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RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE: EXPLORING  
NARRATIVES OF WOMEN TEACHER TRADE UNION  
ACTIVISTS

JEAN ELIZABETH LAIGHT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of Leeds Beckett University for the degree  
of Doctor of Education

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Using stories as a focal point for my thesis is a fitting homage, having been privy to the most wonderful stories so eloquently told to me by my parents, Doris and Jack. They were good listeners and good storytellers though, unfortunately, they passed away far too early, leaving many good stories still untold. I am indebted to them for telling me their stories and for teaching me to listen.

My thanks go particularly to the women teacher activists who trusted me with their stories by agreeing to become participants. Without you, there would be no thesis at all. I am eternally grateful.

There are many women teacher activists, including my participants, whose commitment, perseverance and determination make the lives of teachers and children better by being who they are and doing what they do. They dedicate their time, their emotional labour and their beliefs to fight for the best education for our children. It is to you that this thesis is dedicated.

*'And it's a human need to be told stories. The more we're governed by idiots and have no control over our destinies, the more we need to tell stories to each other about who we are, why we are, where we come from, and what might be possible'.*

*Alan Rickman*

## **Abstract**

This thesis is born out of concern that large numbers of teachers have left the profession. The work involved in teaching has become more time-consuming, and a trend of working longer hours, both at school and at home, has become an expectation. Excessive workload has, therefore, become an important issue within the profession.

With so many teachers leaving the profession, particularly women – who make up over 75% of the profession- it was noted that some women teachers were not only staying in the profession but were also giving up their time and energy to take on the work of trade union activism as a form of resistance against the raft of policy changes which they believed to be the root cause for the exodus. This thesis attempts to discover why they are motivated to do so. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) was chosen as a locus for recruitment of participants, primarily because it is the only trade union which permits exclusive membership to those who have achieved, or are working towards, Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

Narrative analysis was employed as the methodology for this study, because it can be particularly efficient when dealing with disruption or change in a person's life, or group of people's lives, whilst promoting empathy. Narrative analysis, in conjunction with a life history interview approach (Smith, 2012), was used, as these can enable a transformative experience in which the narrator can feel empowered as a result of their awareness of their situation. In total, 11 women from five different NUT demarcated regions across England were interviewed, ranging from the Northern, North West, Yorkshire/Midland, South East and London Regions.

The thesis was steered and driven by the voices of the women teacher activists who describe and explain why they became activists, what they do and how they do it, in order to protect their profession and their colleagues. Their thoughts, feelings and behaviour were explored throughout.

A substantial theoretical framework was provided through the work of Michalinos Zembylas, focusing on emotion and affect in education, and political and social justice issues. Zembylas's work highlights issues of teacher identity, teachers' self-formation, the emotional labour of teaching, resistance and power, and also elucidates the concepts of 'emotional ecology' and 'knowledge ecology' (Zembylas, 2007). Rooted in the social theory of post-structuralism, which explores the construction of meaning, Zembylas cites the work of Michel Foucault as a significant exponent of this thinking, examining the de-construction of discourses which concern power relationships.

The key findings show that the relationship between teachers and the government is strained. Teacher professionalism is perceived by government as an act of resistance in itself. The rapid changes caused by the government's neo-liberal education reform agenda have created a negative effect on teachers. The emotional investment that teachers make in their work causes them to be overworked and stressed, often damaging their mental health.

Some implications from the findings show that the resistance of teachers to the current reforms is what drives their activism. Trade unionism is a vehicle for transformational change. Not only is transformational change possible through discourses, it is also possible to achieve within one's own self. The de-professionalisation of teaching is not so much about the partnership with unqualified people at classroom level, but more about the attempts made by government to professionalise other areas of the education workforce which have led to the de-professionalisation of teaching. Blame, therefore, should be directed towards the government.

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## **Chapter 1 – Introduction to the thesis**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will introduce the rationale for my thesis in which I present the aim of my thesis, which is to discover, through the stories they tell, why women teachers stay in the profession and become trade union activists. In the second part of this chapter, I indicate how subsequent chapters link together to consider my research questions and the aim of my thesis.

#### **1.1 Rationale for the researcher**

I am a Senior Lecturer in Initial Teacher Education, after having spent the majority of my adult life working as a qualified teacher. I taught a multitude of children between the ages of 3 and 12 years old and eventually, during the course of my teaching career, worked full-time, part-time and as a supply teacher in a wide variety of schools across the country, including social priority schools in Liverpool, small, rural schools in villages in Cornwall, large, expanding schools on the edge of West Swindon and more recently in schools across North Yorkshire. During the course of my career, I experienced a number of changes to education, particularly the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1989. This was the first time that I noticed such a large number of colleagues leaving the profession as a direct result of a change in government policy. The job became more time-consuming, and I noticed that a trend of working longer hours, both at school and at home, was becoming an expectation.

My own trade union activism began as a school rep in the late 1990s. Having joined the National Union of Teachers (NUT) as a student, I continued my membership throughout my career, albeit as a relatively passive member. I subsequently became an active member of my current Local Association in 2002 and was voted on to the Regional Council, both of which I regularly attended. I was nominated as a delegate to the Women's Trade Union Congress (TUC) three times, where I delivered speeches on a variety of women's issues. Notably, I have held the office of President of my Local Association twice, held the office of Union Learning Rep, and I am currently the Equalities Officer. I have attended Annual Conference since 2004, the national forum where NUT policy is debated (Appendix 1). I was President of the Conference Committee in 2007 and in 2016 I served as the President's Secretary for the duration of the Conference. I have made several Conference speeches, particularly supporting supply teachers. I wrote a Conference motion regarding supply teachers, which I presented at the Annual

Conference in 2007. The motion was carried and a policy was introduced in support of supply teachers. This issue has been debated at Conference ever since.

Through my networks in the NUT and conversations with former teacher colleagues across the country, I became aware that teachers, mainly women, were leaving the profession unexpectedly, often taking early retirement or leaving because of stress-related illnesses. Consequently, I was interested to find out why some of my NUT colleagues still continued not only to teach under stressful circumstances, but also to work as activists in the Union, giving their time and commitment to this extra work. These observations, therefore, provide the foundation and motivation for my research. In the absence of any literature which asks women teachers themselves why they continue to give their time and energy to NUT work, I decided to ask the women teachers myself to tell me their stories to address this gap in the literature and to enhance the profession's understanding of what drives women teachers to become activists, and also to elicit the emotional cost of their work and its relationship to their activism.

As a career, teaching has always been the preferred choice of women (Washington, 2009; Thornton and Bricheno, 2008; Nelson, et al, 2006; NUT, 2017). During the academic year of 1966-1967, the ratio of women to men in teaching was 2:1, showing 68% of women teaching in the primary sector and 71% of men teaching in the secondary sector (Sheldon, 2010). During the academic year of 1974-1975, women comprised 60% of the teaching workforce, rising to 67% by 1994-1995 (Sheldon, 2010). Currently, 'over 76% of NUT members are women' (NUT, 2017). It has been argued that this gender gap may be due to male students being less likely to achieve the necessary qualifications to teach, as fewer men complete their degree programmes (Washington, 2009). UK statistics have shown that there were 26,200 male primary teachers and 141,000 females in 2004 (Department for Education and Skills website, 2005, in Jones, 2007) yet the numbers of male headteachers were vastly disproportionate (Jones, 2007; Coleman, 2004). Despite these statistics, most headteachers were men, claiming a better chance of promotion than women (Coleman, 2004).

It had also been noted that men were put off careers in teaching due to what they perceive as low pay, and the fear of allegations of abuse, in spite of their wish to work with children and make a positive difference in their lives (Nelson, et al, 2006; Washington, 2009). In a bid to attract men into teaching, there have been a number of incentives to recruit and retain them (Nelson, et al, 2006; Thornton and Bricheno, 2008). However, in spite of incentives and many opportunities for employment, men

have not been choosing to teach (Koch and Farquhar, 2015; Wohlgemuth, 2015). It has been stated that children need male role models in schools (Martino, 2008), particularly in early childhood settings, to enable them to observe the nurturing and caring qualities that men can demonstrate (Brownhill, 2014; Washington, 2009; Thornton and Bricheno, 2008). The complex notions of gender raised by feminism and the sociology of masculinities needed to be taken into account, to provide boys with male teachers as role models (Mills et al, 2004). However, the hegemonic masculine ideal proved to be a continuing barrier to defining exactly what was meant by this male role model (Brownhill, 2015; Pulsford, 2014; Martino, 2008). There was also little evidence, however, to support the notion that role models should be gendered to suit the teacher/pupil working relationship (Carrington, et al, 2008). Indeed, the purpose of the introduction of male teachers as role models for boys was to tackle boys' underachievement, whilst blaming this deficiency on what teaching has been described as a feminised profession (Skelton, 2002). Some students have reported that they perceived no differences between male or female teachers, but were more receptive to the friendliness and rapport between themselves and their teachers, indicating apparent irrelevance of gendered role models (Lahelma, 2000). Furthermore, it has been reported that, having interviewed both boys and girls and their parents, male teachers could be positive role models for both boys and girls, despite the generalised discourse that male role models were necessarily exclusively for boys' welfare (McGrath and Sinclair, 2013).

In essence then, the gender gap in the teaching profession was not perceived to be harmful, as the large numbers of women in the teaching profession were not regarded as 'disadvantageous or problematic' (Weiner and Kallos, 2000). Some students stated that gender was not an important issue, reporting that good working relationships between teachers and pupils were their main concern (Lahelma, 2000). However, some male teachers continued to register their concerns about the feminising nature of teaching and the perceived image of 'doing women's work' (Martino, 2008). Nonetheless, the presumption that teaching has become a feminised profession to the detriment of boys remains a widely contested issue (Mills et al, 2004; Martino, 2008; Weiner and Kallos, 2000; Lahelma, 2000; Dillabough, 1999; Skelton, 2003; Kim, 2013). 'Gender dualisms' within the profession (Dillabough, 1999), and gendered constructions and concepts continue to be challenged for conspiring to restrict opportunities for women in teaching, both in terms of promotion and status within the community, in spite of their valued commitment to educational values and practice (Weiner and Kallos, 2000). Women

who taught in the early years sector argued that, in spite of the low pay and social image, early years teachers were not 'babysitters', but professionally trained and educated teachers who loved teaching and children (Kim, 2013).

To illustrate the extent of the changes to education in recent years, I present a timeline (Appendix 2) which establishes the succession and sequence of policy changes that have taken place from 1967 until 2015. For the purposes of my thesis, I will discuss changes to education since the introduction of the National Curriculum as a legal requirement in 1989. I have included items earlier than 1989 in this timeline to provide context.

## **Summary**

Having become aware that many women teachers were leaving the profession unexpectedly, I became interested in finding out why some of my NUT colleagues still continued not only to teach under stressful circumstances, but also to work as activists in the Union, giving their time and commitment to this extra work. These observations, therefore, provided the foundation and motivation for my research. In the absence of any literature which asks women teachers themselves why they continue to give their time and energy to NUT work, I decided to ask the women teachers myself to tell me their stories to address this gap in the literature and to enhance the profession's understanding of what drives women teachers to become activists, and also to elicit the emotional cost of their work and its relationship to their activism. The aim of my thesis is to discover, through the stories they tell, why women teachers stay in the profession and become trade union activists.

## **1.2 Structure of the thesis**

Chapters Two to Five comprise a review of current literature which has been separated into key concepts, namely Teacher Professionalism, Professionalisation, Identity and Activism. In order to provide appropriate, stipulative definitions for each of these concepts, I have used the advice given by Evans (2002) to inform the process thereby providing conceptual clarity.

Chapter Two addresses a central aim of the thesis which is to privilege teacher voice by providing an underpinning discussion of the ways in which government policy has influenced the perceptions of their professional status causing many teachers to reconsider their place in the profession. Government neo-liberal policy changes have impacted upon teacher autonomy and previously acknowledged perceptions of professionalism. Neither the current nor the historical evolution of teacher professionalism



allows for a clear definition. Some academics have attempted to prompt definitions, citing the teacher's role within the domain of the curriculum and curriculum content. Although such proliferations go some way to attempt to define teacher professionalism, it is apparent that the changing nature of the work itself makes absolute definition difficult to apply. To take any single attempt at a definition would be a reductionist approach, yet all the perspectives have valid and strong contributions to make to the definition of the term.

Chapter Three discusses the process of the professionalisation of support staff and how this has shaped the perceptions of the teaching profession and the shifting nature of the role of the qualified teacher. I have adopted the stance that professionalisation is the formalising of work that is done in order to transform the work into a profession and the worker into a professional. The process of workforce reform in the education setting has been complex involving the introduction of new roles in the classroom and elsewhere which can be disruptive of relationships among and between colleagues.

Chapter Four explores the complexity of teachers' identity and sense of self. The literature focuses upon the impact of government policy and the emotional work of teaching, citing some of the policy moments which have indicated significant changes to teachers' roles and their understanding of the concept of professional identity. The neo-liberal agenda has been viewed as a fundamental challenge to teachers' sense of identity resulting in negative consequences fuelled by a sense of isolation, often exacerbated by school politics and the seemingly perennial debate around classroom control. In acknowledging that the lives of teachers are complex and subject to social and political debates, the need for their agency in negotiating and challenging the discourses of accountability and reform is reinforced.

Chapter Five reviews factors concerning activism and related concepts. I explore the phenomenon of global resistance and the concepts of collective resistance, power, agency and resilience in the context of my research questions. Although teachers are in a strong position being on the frontline of teaching in the classroom on a daily basis, the oppressive nature of the government education reform agenda has removed this advantage through their neo-liberal attitudes and behaviour. The power of solidarity against the neo-liberal education agenda has provided a strong stance which is empowering to teachers locally and globally.

Chapter Six examines the most appropriate, authentic and creative methodology to enable me to fulfil the aim of my thesis, which is to explore, through the stories they tell, why women teachers choose to become trade union activists and how their participation has informed their professional identity and sense of self. I will explain the rationale used

to formulate my main research question and the supportive research questions. Here, I will state my ontological and epistemological stances and go on to discuss the reasons for choosing this methodology. I also use the work of Michelinos Zembylas to provide a theoretical framework to interrogate the most significant issues that have arisen as a result of examining data provided through the women teachers' stories.

Chapter Seven presents my interpretation of some of the main themes and sub-themes that have emerged from the data. Having conducted an initial analytical approach, I show how I began by 'pawing' to get the 'feel' of the data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). I then systematically began to code the data to identify themes. At the same time as I was coding the data in its entirety, I kept a record of individual themes that occurred in each participant's interview transcript. At the end of coding each individual transcript, I collated and listed each theme the participant had presented, counting the instances when these had occurred. In using the words of the participants themselves, I try to represent their 'voices' as far as it is possible to do this. I show that I have constantly revisited the original raw data to keep their 'voices' in focus, rather than mine.

Chapter Eight is informed by the literature review and findings chapters to present a discussion regarding the main themes that have arisen from the data in the context of the research questions. I use the research questions as headings within this chapter and specify the aim of my thesis at the onset. The concepts which have formed the basis of the literature review chapters – teacher professionalism, professionalization, identity and activism – have been considered here, explicitly and implicitly, to maintain cohesion in the thesis. The themes of my findings relate to my research questions in a structural way.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis, fulfilling the aim of my thesis, which is to discover, through the stories they tell, why women teachers stay in the profession and become trade union activists. I provide conclusions to my thesis to explain why the research was carried out and I also provide recommendations for further research and discuss the limitations of the research I have undertaken in this study. Most importantly, I present what I believe to be my original contribution to the field of knowledge.

## **Summary**

In the first part of this chapter, I have introduced the rationale for my thesis in which I have presented the aim of my thesis, which is to discover, through the stories they tell, why

women teachers stay in the profession and become trade union activists. In the second part of this chapter, I have indicate how subsequent chapters link together to consider my research questions and the aim of my thesis.

The next chapter addresses a central aim of the thesis which is to privilege teacher voice by providing an underpinning discussion of the ways in which government policy has influenced the perceptions of their professional status causing many teachers to reconsider their place in the profession. Government neo-liberal policy changes have impacted upon teacher autonomy and previously acknowledged perceptions of professionalism. It is apparent that teaching has historically been driven by the desire and need of teachers to educate children, yet successive governments have curtailed teachers' autonomy in favour of imposing various forms of adversarial accountability.

## **Chapter 2 – Teacher professionalism: teacher voice, government policy and the emergence of a ‘new professionalism’.**

### **Introduction**

This chapter addresses a central aim of the thesis which is to privilege teacher voice by providing an underpinning discussion of the ways in which government policy has influenced the perceptions of their professional status causing many teachers to reconsider their place in the profession. Government neo-liberal policy changes have impacted upon teacher autonomy and previously acknowledged perceptions of professionalism. There being no universally accepted definition of teacher professionalism, I have drawn upon the definition provided by Osmond-Johnson (2015) as an appropriate starting point in relation to my thesis because it has been adopted as a result of consulting teacher trade unionists.

The Osmond-Johnson (2015) consultation of teachers from the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), which defined teacher professionalism as a combination of 'learner, mentor, advocate and collaborator' (p 14), combines many of the features of teachers' own perspectives of the nature of the term. The consultation also discusses teacher professionalism in terms of teachers having autonomy, respect and the freedom to choose the direction of their own professional development. In order to provide conceptual clarity, I use the term 'teacher professionalism' to denote a stance that teachers themselves have claimed, which is that teacher professionalism requires highly specialised competencies, expertise and proficiencies, particularly on matters of curriculum and assessment, and that their professional judgement should be respected.

While there is no universally accepted definition of teacher professionalism, due to its complexities - primarily with regard to occupational and political concepts which are subject to social and power relations - (Creasy, 2015; Bair, 2016; Vu, 2016). Biesta (2015) proposes that, since the purpose of education is multi-dimensional, functioning in 'three domains of purpose' – qualification, socialisation and subjectification – a teacher's professional judgement is paramount, due to the highly specialised skills involved in the nature of teaching. He expresses concern that teacher professionalism is under threat due to the impact of accountability, acknowledging a need to focus upon the status of teaching in order to re-establish a forum for teachers' professional judgement (Biesta, 2015). Coulter and Orme (2000) claim that defining teacher professionalism is difficult in so far as, compared to the professionalism of doctors or engineers, the 'moral dimensions of teaching' and the

'fundamental democratic character of education' are not usually taken into account. Such comparisons are reductionist and the use of language such as 'clients' or 'customers' is inappropriate (Coulter and Orme 2000).

The historical evolution of teacher professionalism does not allow for a clear definition either. Some academics have attempted to prompt definitions, citing the teacher's role within the domain of the curriculum and curriculum content (McCulloch et al, 2000; Howells, 2003) or by applying three major components of teacher professionalism, namely behavioural, attitudinal and intellectual (Evans, 2011). The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) define 'teacher professionalism to be about exercising judgement on curriculum' (in Parker, 2015, p 454). Yet it appears to be the government rather than teachers or teacher organisational bodies, such as the ATL, who has taken charge of defining what teacher professionalism actually is. Teacher professionalism has been explained as a 'kaleidoscope', creating different representations of values, virtues and political dimensions (Vu, 2016). Comparison between professionalism constructs have been asserted, exploring the professionalism of nursing and social work to identify teacher professionalism, concluding that in nursing, these notions of professionalism may be characterised as 'status professional', in social work as 'activist professional' and in teaching, as 'restrictive' (Bair, 2016). The concept of teacher professionalism as synonymous with quality and reform has also been presented, though teachers themselves find the term confusing, as it obscures issues other than quality (Johnston, 2015). Having investigated the notion of 'professional memory', Tarpey (2016) indicates that teacher professionalism is developed during a teacher's early career, featuring the formulation of 'attitudes, values and missions'.

Comparing teaching to the medical profession, engineering or social work may go some way to construct positive definitions, these professions traditionally having been generally held in high regard, yet there is a sense that neo-liberal government policy is determined to undermine the teaching profession. Evans defines professionalism as 'practice that is consistent with commonly held delineations of a specific occupational group and that both contributes to and reflects perceptions of the group's purpose and status and the specific nature, range and levels of service provided by, and expertise prevalent within, the occupational group, as well as the general ethical code underpinning this practice' (Evans, 2013, p484). Furthermore, Evans explains that the term 'professionalism' is currently used in a wider remit to describe what a person does in the context of their work and the function they

perform (2015, 2014). She suggests that it is not a 'merit-laden label applicable only to those employed in what are considered the 'classic' professions: the law, medicine and the church; it is a term used to denote people's being in any work context' (Evans, 2015, p1). Although these proliferations go some way to attempt to define teacher professionalism, it is apparent that the changing nature of the work of teaching itself makes absolute definition difficult to apply. To take any single attempt at a definition would be a reductionist approach, yet all the perspectives have valid and strong contributions to make to the definition of the term.

## **2.1 Teachers' perceptions of autonomy in defining their professionalism**

In recent studies, some teachers express their own perceptions of the notion of teacher professionalism as being grounded in their sense of vocation, their perspective on the curriculum and their own continued learning (Day et al, 2007). Problems encountered through the execution of government policy have been resolved through teacher learning, although this suggests that any deficiencies lay with teachers. Teacher learning is defined as skill acquisition and competency development (Mockler, 2012). Teachers, themselves, discuss the notion of professionalism in order to provide clarity as to what they believe to be important to them (Tichenor and Tichenor, 2005; Swann et al, 2010; Hult, 2016). In Canada, Osmond-Johnson (2015) consulted teachers from the ATA, most of whom define teacher professionalism as a combination of 'learner, mentor, advocate and collaborator' (p 14), as well as having autonomy, respect and the freedom to choose the direction of one's own professional development. Typically, it has previously been the remit of external agencies, such as academics, to provide perspectives on the nature of teacher professionalism. Although this subject has been continually debated, there has been little evidence of teachers voicing their own opinions in the debate (Warwick, 2014; Swann et al, 2010). Teachers' perspectives on the notion of teacher professionalism are therefore a welcome inclusion.

Traditionally perceived to be an autonomous profession, the introduction of the National Curriculum (1989) challenged this way of thinking. Prior to the government initiative, institutional norms had maintained that curriculum design, development, delivery and assessment largely belonged to the teacher (Parker, 2015; Hargreaves, 2000). In the wake of the National Curriculum, however, teachers have been confused or unwilling to articulate their own sense of professionalism. Yet the results of recent research show that teacher perspectives on teacher

professionalism are multi-faceted and that teachers display a deep-rooted sense of vocation (Warwick, 2014). In the face of change through government intervention, teachers have considered themselves as having the same vocational roots as before (Swann et al, 2010), extolling such notions as an inner core of strong beliefs, commitments, attitudes and perspectives, as well as passion and dedication to their work and the children they teach (Kim, 2013; Warwick, 2014; Swann et al, 2010). Teachers' notions of vocation remain a key component of their sense of professionalism.

Having encountered a reductionist approach to their autonomy, teachers believe that their views and opinions have been overlooked by government due to mutual mistrust (Swann et al, 2010; Hult, 2016). An example of this is provided by an example of some of the conflicting attitudes held by teachers and government towards evaluations. Teachers believe that their ability to distinguish and build upon children's work by means of internal evaluations is a significant aspect of their autonomy. Some teachers, having explored both internal and external evaluations to useful effect, believing that their professional judgement has been overlooked and that this would be a useful tool, when used on a daily basis, to enhance learning (Hult, 2016). In spite of compliance with external evaluations, some teachers have witnessed negative consequences. Although teachers believe that teacher professionalism incorporates the notions of professional responsibility and accountability, the government does not allow teachers to assume the responsibility commensurate with public accountability. The effects upon teachers' work in this negative environment have resulted in a less creative curriculum delivery (Hult, 2016). Teachers believe that the lack of freedom of choice to involve a combination of internal and external evaluations stifles both teaching and learning due to government mistrust of their professional judgements. Many teachers believe that their professionalism exists on multiple levels which, on the whole, incorporate compliance with government accountability while at the same time carrying out their daily classroom work (Hult, 2016; Zembylas, 2005; Swann et al, 2010). It is therefore difficult for teachers to preserve their professional integrity whilst endeavouring to adhere to the attitudes and behaviours of both government accountability and their own sense of professionalism (Tichenor and Tichenor, 2005).

Institutional expectations can also seriously affect a teacher's autonomy and their self-perception of their sense of professionalism. Some teachers believe that their views may be at odds with institutional expectations, affecting their job satisfaction,

professional agency and teacher autonomy (Endacott et al, 2015). An example of this is manifest in a teacher who believes that more time should be given to foundation subjects, such as art, and finds it difficult to reconcile their own and their institution's aspirations when little time is given to foundation subjects within the curriculum timetable. Although core subjects are given priority, some teachers may perceive that literacy and numeracy are not adequate to provide success for all pupils. In doing so, such teachers consider the wellbeing and self-esteem of the pupils in providing more opportunities for success in a foundation subject, which would be in contradiction to the institutional expectations. It is important that a healthy organisational structure and climate is in place to facilitate positive experiences, to allow teachers to develop their shifting notions of professionalism (Kilinc et al, 2015; Endacott et al, 2015; Zembylas, 2005). Whilst trying to be true to themselves and work in line with governmental and institutional structures, some teachers find it increasingly difficult to work in environments which are not conducive to their own sense of professionalism.

Whilst experienced teachers are conflicted in their perceptions of their sense of professionalism, trainee teachers and newly qualified teachers (NQT) are beginning to come to terms with their new and aspiring roles. When this group was consulted on their perceptions of teacher professionalism, they considered their personal and emerging professional lives in the context of reflection (Everington, 2016; Crouse, 2003). There is not only a need for trainee teachers and NQTs to be given time to reflect upon their new roles as teachers, but they also need specialist support to enable them to reflect constructively to allow their professional identities to emerge (Everington, 2016; Crouse, 2003). However, in contrast to many experienced teachers who are concerned about threats to their autonomy, some trainee teachers welcome the professional standards in assessment, due to the perception that assessment criteria would be a means of scaffolding their learning (Loughland and Ellis, 2016). There could also be a perception that assessment criteria would replicate the 'tick box' systems in which they had previously found success whilst studying in the past. Some women teachers who teach children in the Early Years negatively perceive the added dimension of being considered as babysitters by the media and society in general (Kim, 2013) purely because of the age of the children they teach. In spite of high levels of education and professional training, these teachers perceive their professionalism to be tainted, being regarded as a low-level professional and often having to accept low pay (Kim, 2013). It is important that



teachers such as these NQTs and Early Years teachers are given support to gain the confidence to take control of their own sense of professionalism.

Teachers' perspectives of their own professionalism appear to be confused and irresolute. At every level of experience, teachers are bound by government intervention, the extent to which they conform corresponding to their own levels of confidence and tenacity. Early career teachers are more likely to conform to the government's accountability measures to a greater extent than teachers who have confidence in their own ability to teach in the broadest terms. Time for reflection appears to be a significant factor in determining a definition of teacher professionalism for those teachers who are not yet able to feel sufficiently confident in their careers. Teachers who are trade union members appear to be more likely to have the confidence to state their preferences as to what constitutes teacher professionalism. The Osmond-Johnson (2015) consultation of teachers from the ATA, which defined teacher professionalism as a combination of 'learner, mentor, advocate and collaborator', is the closest satisfactory definition of teacher professionalism which combines many of the features of teachers' own perspectives of the nature of the term. Combined with further aspects of the study, citing autonomy, respect and the freedom to choose the direction of one's own professional development, these features encapsulate the essence of the literature to present of what teachers believe teacher professionalism to be.

## **2.2 Government policy and the emergence of a 'new professionalism'**

Government policy objectives have been cited as the instigator of the more formalised and structured notion of teacher professionalism (Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010). Teachers' own perceptions of professionalism have become confused and irresolute since the National Curriculum was introduced in 1989 as the government took the lead in developing this more structured and formalised notion. Professional standards underpinned this premise and are at odds with teachers' own perceptions. The current concept of teacher professionalism has been defined by professional standards (Connell, 2009; Hayes, 2011, Evans, 2011).

The 'Teachers' Standards' document (DfE, 2012; DfE, 2013) merged the General Teaching Council (GTC) Code of Conduct with the TDA Standards (2007a) to create a comprehensive document in two parts; part one covered 'Teaching', while part two covered 'Personal and Professional Conduct'. It was expected that all teachers would adhere to the Teaching Standards set down in this document, while any cases of misconduct would be dealt with by the Teaching Agency, on the Secretary of State's

behalf. The former part of this document endorsed the fact that the government elevated the notion of canon knowledge above all other aspects of education (Parker, 2015). The inclusion of the latter part of the document superseded the previous GTC Code of Conduct which was written after a consultation process was offered to all qualified teachers (GTC, 2009a). However, many teachers believed the inclusion of the 'Personal and Professional Conduct' clause, like the GTC's Code of Conduct, to be an intrusive ploy by the government in order to establish control in their private and personal lives, as well as their professional lives (Page, 2013; Laight, 2009; Maddern, 2012).

Teachers believed that the neo-liberal government policy agenda, including all its facets, had conspired to attack professionalism and demoralise teachers. The relationship between the government and the profession had deteriorated, resulting in a lack of trust on both sides. Teacher identity quickly became a casualty of the new regime as the impact of the policies began to erode their confidence. Teachers were being compelled to relinquish their former autonomy as professionals to instead take on the mantle of a technician.

Government neo-liberal policies affect what is described as a 'new professionalism'; a reaction to market-based reforms (Anderson and Cohen, 2015). As a consequence of imposed changes of control and public accountability, teachers have become dependent upon external definitions of teacher professionalism to demonstrate quality, progress and achievement (Day, 2002). Teacher professionalism is going through continual changes, constantly being challenged as internal and external forces alternate; the implication being that it is difficult to define (Sachs, 2016). Professional standards may have caused teacher professionalism to be cited as more formal and structured, but the problem of definition is that professionalism remains in a constant state of flux due to the constant evaluation and change which is the outcome of mechanisms designed to demonstrate quality.

Teacher professionalism may be defined as the combination of graduate status and professional competence, yet there abounds a different notion of professionalism, citing 'educational professionalism' in the light of the inclusion of teaching assistants in the workforce. The notion of 'educational professionalism' includes all people working with children and young people in the context of education which dilutes the notion of teacher professionalism even further. Role ambiguity is a fundamental issue in the demarcation of work, but by embracing all members of the education workforce, the government suggests that opportunities for conflict would diminish and a wider debate can be identified (Edmond and Hayler, 2013). Yet the

implications of such a debate mean that confusion could obscure the real issue, which is that of teacher professionalism.

At the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with no universally accepted model of teacher professionalism, defining this term conclusively was not possible (Whitty, 2000). It is necessary, then, to provide an historical perspective to chart and understand the evolution of teacher professionalism. The campaign to establish professional status for teachers in England has been a hard-fought battle since Victorian times. From 1848 until 1969, the status of teaching rose from an under-qualified to a graduate profession (Gilroy, 1999). The 'Elementary Education Act' (1870), introduced by William Forster, stated that children must attend school from the ages of 5 to 10 years old. This was a significant accomplishment in the education of children, as it introduced a national system of education, including the foundation of Local Authorities (LAs) as well as a means of funding. This 1870 Act not only led the way to establishing a more inclusive education system for children, it also enabled the pupil-teacher system for training teachers to be reviewed in that instead of pupils training to become teachers under the guidance of the headmaster, pupil-teacher centres were established separately to allow for teacher training to take place (National Archives, 2015). LAs took over the responsibility of training teachers in training colleges in 1902, subsequently leading to the involvement of universities.

The Robbins Report (1963) into Higher Education specifically stated that teacher training should be conducted in universities with appropriate provision. It welcomed the extension of the two-year course to a three-year in 1960, which included 15% of the course on placement in schools. The report also stated that 1% of graduates would be taking additional year-long courses to enable them to obtain a teaching qualification. The introduction of the optional fourth year on teacher training courses in 1963, therefore, enabled student teachers to study for the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree, indicating that teaching was already becoming a graduate profession. The introduction of the Plowden Report (1967) strengthened the perceptions of teacher professionalism by reinforcing the role of primary school teachers in enhancing the learning of the children they taught. The Plowden Report was the first document to recognise the importance of primary education, since education had initially been focused upon the work of secondary schools which were subject centred.

However, it was not long before teachers' behaviour and functionality became the predominant drivers in devising these standards from an earlier time (Connell,

2006). Despite advancements of the 1960s, perception of teacher professionalism continued to be influenced by standardised and intelligence testing introduced in 1950s which, rather than acknowledging teacher autonomy, perpetuated a technical-professional model in education (Connell, 2009). Teachers in the 1950s had a high degree of autonomy and an unquestioned acknowledgement of their professionalism, supported by the fact of their sheer numbers, and the automatic respect for institutional authority at this time (Sim, 2005). However, as teacher education in universities grew, trainee teachers were exposed to humanistic learning which together with the skills they learned as teachers, created what Connell calls the 'reflective practitioner', leading to the notions of 'critical pedagogy' and 'teachers as intellectuals' (Connell, 2009). This model led to a more autonomous profession, showing that education was not simply applied knowledge which was needed to pass the standardised tests.

In an attempt to chart the historical evolution of teacher professionalism, Hargreaves (2000) identified four phases which exemplified the historical progress of teaching in the UK, and consequently, four phases of teacher professionalism, namely 'pre-professional' – up to 1960s, 'autonomous professional' period – 1960s – mid 1980s, 'collegial professional' era – mid 1980s – 1990s, and 'post-professional' or 'postmodern' era (Hargreaves, 2000). The autonomy identified in the second phase was short lived in the face of government intervention to eradicate what had come to be known as the 'Secret Garden' (Parker, 2015, p457) and the 'Golden Age' (Whitty, 2006). Both characterisations refer to a time when teacher autonomy was acknowledged due to teaching being a graduate profession, in which teachers were able to teach what they believed their pupils needed to learn rather than being constrained by government intervention. By the 1980s and the onset of the National Curriculum (1989), government control had taken over teacher autonomy to some degree, as well as curriculum design and children's learning, in the form of professional standards and standardised testing (Ross, 2000).

Throughout the historical context presented here, there is a sense of successive governments being afraid to give teachers what they consider to be too much freedom to teach the way they believe to be right. 21<sup>st</sup> century changes only continued earlier perspectives, almost formalising them and enshrining the fear of teacher autonomy in official government policy.

The installation of the Blair Labour government in 1997 intensified the changes to the role of the teacher and the concepts of teacher professionalism, being 'heavily

influenced by the government policy objectives', thus creating a forum of performativity, accountability and fear of failure, and, significantly, allowing support staff to cover teachers' work (Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010). The concept of teacher professionalism was influenced by later changes regarding the role of teachers and support staff within an environment of performativity, accountability and fear of failure. Teacher autonomy was exacerbated by later changes to be discussed in the next chapter on professionalization.

It has been argued that both the Conservative and successive New Labour governments conspired to coerce teachers into becoming subservient to and agents of the state through the imposition of standards and high-stakes accountability (Beck, 2008). Instead of enabling the profession to improve, the process of de-professionalisation took place, disguised as a remodelling programme which would modernise and renew the teaching profession (Beck, 2008; Gillard, 2005). As subservient agents of the state (Beck, 2008), teachers were being put in a position of confusion with regard to their perceptions of their own professionalism. Due to the result of the increase in workload and a target-driven culture, many teachers responded by leaving the profession completely (Gillard, 2005). Increased workload was due to adherence to target setting while the administration of the latter gave rise to increase in the former.

Having created a forum of confusion, the government appeared to be offering teachers a positive contribution from which they would benefit through the extra help in their non-teaching work, thus diminishing the excessive workload of which they complained. However, some teachers who stayed in the profession tried to continue to teach as they had been and tried to hold on to their former notions of teacher professionalism. As TAs and other unqualified staff began to imitate teachers' work, teachers continually forfeited their long-held beliefs in their own professionalism.

During the early 2000s, teachers became aware of the significant developments and trends that were occurring in education, namely the introduction of management skills and language, the neo-liberal marketisation of education, and what was perceived as the neo-liberal distrust of professionalism and of teachers specifically (Connell, 2009; Sahlberg, 2012; Hayes, 2011). Teachers became subject to audits of professionalism, measuring their effectiveness and competence at all levels of their careers to produce measurable data (Gunter, 2008). The onset of league tables introduced a competitive element between schools (Gunter and

Rayner, 2007; Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). Teachers' perceived notions of their own professionalism became unsustainable, due to the top-down approach to the introduction of reform. Some teachers found the new policy changes difficult to manage, threatening their notions of their own professionalism and the profession to which they belonged, and began to leave the profession (Illingworth, 2007), resulting in teacher dissatisfaction and a potential teacher shortage. In an attempt to attract teachers to the profession and reward existing teachers, Blair's New Labour government quickly published its first Green Paper on the teaching profession (HMSO, 1998) which stated that teachers should be recognised for their positive contributions to the profession.

Although the positive contribution of teachers had been recognised in this government paper, teacher professionalism was still perceived by the government as a discourse of resistance (Bourke et al, 2015; Gillard, 2005). Some teachers believed that the imposition of standards by the government had been deliberately set in place in order to take teaching forward into the 21st century to the detriment of teacher professionalism (Bourke et al, 2015); the standards representing the Foucauldian themes of regulation, surveillance, self-surveillance and social control which reinforce the argument that the relationship between teachers and the government was breaking down.

### **2.3 The influence of Scandinavian education systems**

The introduction of a Masters level profession to teaching appeared to be a significant step to provide clarity of the differences in the work carried out by teachers and unqualified staff, thus raising the image of teacher professionalism. The blurring of boundaries would vanish and teachers would feel respected again by the government, and subsequently the general public. The relationship between teachers and the government would improve, leading to more cooperation and harmonisation. This vision of improvement was a reflection of what the government perceived as the success of the state of education in Finland. Teachers and teacher professionalism in Finland was seen to be a valuable asset by both teachers and government in England (Sahlberg, 2012). The Blair New Labour government had become increasingly aware of the need to improve education in England in the wake of the poor results represented in the league tables, published in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The three-yearly PISA results had cited Finland as top ranking since 2000 (OECD, 2005). Yet extracting one aspect of the nature of the top education system in order to achieve top quality results

would constitute a superficial measure rather than the holistic approach which was necessary.

According to Sahlberg (2012), a leading exponent of the Finnish education system, teaching in Finland was a highly sought-after, high status profession. There was no testing of children and no streaming, the children did not wear uniforms, average class sizes were 20, the teachers' working days were shorter, all children received a free school meal daily, there were no inspections, play was valued and children began formal school at aged seven. Teachers were treated with respect, their professional judgements took the place of testing and the curriculum was creative. Only the very best students were accepted to train as teachers, ranking equally with students of law and medicine. They were expected to complete a degree course and achieve an excellent academic profile before being allowed to apply to train on a teaching course, and could expect to train for 5-6 years before they were qualified to teach (Sahlberg, 2012). Although the Finnish education system was seen as a prized and successful system to which other countries aspired (Sahlberg, 2012), teachers in England were aware of the shortcomings of the ad hoc extractions from Finnish policy by the government in order to improve standards. By trying to emulate success through cherry picking an individual aspect of Finland's success, teachers in England were not hopeful of success, either for themselves or the profession as a whole.

In 2010, the new coalition government scrapped The Children's Plan (DCSF, 2006) and with it the hopes of teaching becoming a Masters level profession. However, another Scandinavian initiative was adopted by the new government – the introduction of academies. The Academies Act (2010) stated that any maintained school could become an academy, focusing initially on secondary schools, allowing a school to cease affiliation with the local authority and become autonomous, both financially and with regards to the curriculum. Primary schools were also invited to apply for academy status, many becoming free schools, which were conducted along the lines of the free schools in Sweden, whereby independent schools were set up by individuals, not necessarily having achieved a teaching qualification, and competed for government funding. In Sweden, there were already concerns about the nature of these for-profit, standards-driven free schools on which the English model was to be based. Teachers in Swedish schools were conflicted, due to the educational inequity, competitive school market, conflicting institutional and social ideals, resulting in difficulties in negotiating their own professional identities (Milner, 2015). Instead of the enhanced professionalisation that The Children's Plan (DCSF, 2006) offered, teachers were thrown into turmoil again due to the de-professionalising nature of the Academies Act (2010) which set up competition and

confusion amongst teachers and jeopardised the relationship between teachers and the government.

Academies and free schools in England were state-funded, independent and able to spend money however they chose, albeit still subject to Ofsted inspections. However, teachers in these schools were not expected to hold qualified teacher status (QTS), allowing head teachers to employ unqualified teachers. Although teachers in state schools were bound by government policy to adhere to the framework of the current National Curriculum, academies and free schools in England were given a new legal status which enabled them to opt out of using the National Curriculum and veer towards a curriculum of their choosing which had to be 'broad and balanced' (Parker, 2015). The introduction of the Academies Act (2010), therefore, did not appear to be in line with the government's initial intention, purporting that the National Curriculum was put in place to allow for pupils to become better citizens, promoting confidence in future employment and further study (Parker, 2015). This departure, along with the continued strengthening of government control over state education as a whole, was a new threat to teachers and teacher professionalism (Hargreaves, 2000). Staff in academies and free schools in England were allowed more autonomy than qualified teachers in state schools, in spite of the National Curriculum being a statutory government policy in state schools which was deemed to be put in place to improve teaching and learning (Everington, 2016). This new initiative promoted further division and unrest within the teaching profession, as qualified and unqualified teachers worked alongside each other, leading to more teachers questioning their professionalism and roles within the new academies.

Despite successive governments in England declaring admiration for the Scandinavian system, it could not be bolted-on to a culture which equates education with parenting. Various governments in England have been instrumental in determining teaching as a feminised profession, capitalising on the 'mothering' and nurturing aspects of working with children. Models of teacher professionalism are driven by the concept of a 'good' teacher in Western society (Connell, 2009). Western governments' prefer models of the 'competent craftsman', together with the 'charismatic' label, which appear in popular culture, whilst the Oriental tradition differs strongly, as the status of a teacher in this culture is high and teachers were granted respect, being heralded as the 'cognitive revolutionary' (Connell, 2009; Acker, 1999). The Australian concept of a 'good teacher' was originally cited as a person who would be a servant to the government requirements in the days of colonialism; while in England, it was recognised that not only was the 'good teacher' a preferred government requirement, but that the role of women teachers was



viewed in the context of the family and hence the 'good mother' notion perpetuated (Acker in Connell, 2009; Murray, 2006). In blurring the concepts of the 'good teacher' and the 'good mother', the government had wrongly cast women primary teachers in the role of carers and nurturers of young children (Connell, 2009; Murray, 2006). This notion continues to perpetuate today.

It is staunchly disputed that teaching should be synonymous with parenting (Thornton and Bricheno, 2008). Strongly opposed arguments condemn the occupation of teaching as a feminised profession and of teaching as mothering, which perpetuates the stereotypical notion that caring and mothering skills are necessary in the primary classroom (Connell, 2009; Murray, 2006; Thornton and Bricheno, 2008). It is also argued that such misconceptions should be ignored as justification for prolonging these myths about the teaching profession, and thus discouraging men from entering the profession (Thornton and Bricheno, 2008; Connell, 2009; Murray, 2006). Rather than taking the concept of a 'good mother' into the classroom and professionalising it, Connell (2009) suggests that the unique knowledge base that has grown, together with the notion of 'the reflective practitioner', could assist in enabling the improvement of the status of teachers.

It would appear that attempts to construct the feminisation of the teaching profession are made as a pejorative measure. It is another point of contention between the government and teachers in terms of teacher professionalism and may be due to a sense of entitlement by white male dominance in governmental positions. Gendered labelling which categorises teachers in pejorative terms is unhelpful. The use of the term 'practitioner' when describing a teacher may be helpful, such as the term 'reflective practitioner'. However, this term may still be confused with the job titles given to members of school teams, particularly in the early years, when 'practitioner' is used to describe anyone, whatever qualifications if at all, working with young children.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has addressed a central aim of the thesis which is to privilege teacher voice by providing an underpinning discussion of the ways in which government policy has influenced the perceptions of their professional status causing many teachers to reconsider their place in the profession. Government neo-liberal policy changes have impacted upon teacher autonomy and previously acknowledged perceptions of professionalism.

External evaluations and government accountability have had a negative impact upon teachers' perceptions of their own professionalism (Hult, 2016). The work and conceptions of professionalism of teachers has been changed in recent years due to government initiatives and policies, though teachers have continued to contain some of their own insights and views on professionalism (Swann et al, 2010).

There appears to be a lack of balance or compromise between government policy agenda and teachers' judgement concerning the nature of their work which should be recognised as relevant, effective and important. The relationship between government and the teaching profession has shown itself to be in disunity, whereas were this relationship to be in harmony, both sides would be instrumental in providing the best education, enhancing the teaching and learning experience for children. Yet government perspectives and agenda are solely reflected in policy which pays little heed to teachers' professional judgements, knowledge or feelings. There is a perceived lack of respect from government by teachers which manifests itself in the way in which the government states how policy should be implemented. It is apparent that teaching has historically been driven by the desire and need of teachers to educate children, yet successive governments have curtailed teachers' autonomy in favour of imposing various forms of adversarial accountability. Instead of educating teachers to the highest standard and allowing them to teach children to an equally high standard, teachers have had to fight for professional status for themselves and broader opportunities for the children they teach. The current dilution of the profession by inviting unqualified people to take over teachers' work is impeding the progress of children's education which had once seemed to be goal for both teachers and government. Following the breakdown of the relationship between government and teachers, there is a danger that teachers will be defined, and more worryingly define themselves, in terms of external definitions derived through accountability models which determine teachers' behaviour and functionality.

The next chapter discusses the process of the professionalisation of support staff and how this has shaped the perceptions of the teaching profession and the shifting nature of the role of the qualified teacher. I have adopted the stance that professionalisation is the formalising of work that is done in order to transform the work into a profession and the worker into a professional. The problem of the demarcation of work in professionalising this form of support work has resulted in consequences which have had the unintended effect of de-professionalisation in other areas, particularly as demarcation becomes blurred.

The process of workforce reform in the education setting has been complex involving the introduction of new roles in the classroom and elsewhere which can be disruptive of relationships among and between colleagues. The central themes of the enhancement of the role of teaching assistants (TAs), the changing nature of teachers' work, issues concerning the re-construction of teamwork and changes to Early Years education emerge from close examination of key policy texts including 'Raising standards and tackling workload: a national agreement' (DfES, 2003), 'Remodelling the school workforce' (Ofsted, 2005), the National Strategies - National Literacy Strategy (1998); National Numeracy Strategy (1999), 'Supporting Families in the Foundation Years' (DfE, 2011d) and 'Teachers' Standards (Early Years)' (NCTL, 2013).

### **Chapter 3 – Professionalisation of education support roles and the de-professionalisation of teaching?**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the process of the professionalisation of support staff and how this has shaped the perceptions of the teaching profession and the shifting nature of the role of the qualified teacher. In order to provide conceptual clarity, I have adopted the stance that 'professionalisation' is the formalising of work that is done in order to transform the work into a profession and the worker into a professional. In the previous chapter, I have considered the definition of the term teacher professionalism as a combination of 'learner, mentor, advocate and collaborator' (Osmond-Johnson, 2015, p14), as well as having autonomy, respect and the freedom to choose the direction of their own professional development.

Professionalisation represents the formalisation of the work with which a person is engaged, therefore the formalisation process is embedded into a profession (Cremin et al, 2005). An example of this is when a person with no formal qualifications who may be working in a school on a voluntary basis is subsequently offered a contractual post. As a result of this offer, the volunteer is given training, resulting in a named qualification, to enhance their skills in line with government policy to enable pupils' learning. I believe that the work that support staff do has been professionalised to comply with governmental standards. The problem of the demarcation of work in professionalising this form of support work has resulted in consequences which have had the unintended effect of de-professionalisation in other areas, particularly as demarcation becomes blurred.

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### **3.1 The enhancement of the role of TAs**

With the introduction of the documents 'Raising standards and tackling workload: a national agreement' (DfES, 2003) and 'Remodelling the school workforce' (Ofsted, 2005), under the New Labour government, the role of the TA became an essential part of the workforce (Cremin et al, 2005). Since the 1960s the differentiation of role between teacher and TA had been stable. The role embodied professional competence as distinct from the role of teacher which was afforded graduate status (Edmond and Hayler, 2013). The importance of the TA had been recognised in the 1960s in the Plowden Report (1967), the role being seen as 'an extra pair of hands' whereby the TA would perform the function of a 'domestic helper', helping in practical ways and also helping children who had difficulties both physically and in relation to classroom activities (Plowden, 1967). The increased use of, and investment in, support staff was prompted by a variety of government initiatives such as the Warnock Report (1978) which previously heralded an increase in the need for extra support staff, followed by requirements of subsequent Codes of Practice for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), such as 'Special Educational Needs: Code of Practice' (DfES, 2001), which aimed to integrate children with SEN into mainstream schools and settings (Collins and Simco, 2006).

The role of the TA in assisting children with SEN became a matter for increased focus with the introduction of workforce remodelling. Despite the increased effectiveness of TAs working in SEN, expectations in this role, as with all TA roles, gave rise to tensions and contradictions. Tensions arose due to the inconsistent training offered to TAs, many of whom had not been given any formal training. Those who had received appropriate training claimed that the benefits not only enhanced their work with the children, but also enabled them to work more closely with the teachers they supported, having gained more knowledge and experience than the teachers (Mackenzie, 2011; Butt and Lowe, 2012; Rubie-Davies, et al, 2010; Graves, 2014). Initial tensions such as these increased as further developments occurred in the wake of The National Agreement (DfES, 2003, p2) which stated that there would be 'significant implications for support staff', who would be 'increasingly recognised for the contribution they make in raising pupil standards'. The document indicated that support staff would be 'important members of the school team' and that 'these support staff will have access to expanded roles and improved choices and career opportunities'. TAs, however, experienced local inconsistency as to how they were rewarded for the value of their contribution nationally.

As part of the new initiative to professionalise the education workforce, 25,000 TAs were trained to achieve higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) status (Graves and Williams, 2016). By 2011, TAs as a whole represented 25% of the school workforce (Webster et al, 2011). This was a significant departure in the perceived role of TAs who became more integrated into the education workforce with their expanding activities. Work-based learning was interspersed with the introduction of foundation degrees for TAs and HLTAs (Edmond and Price, 2009; Burgess and Mayes, 2009). Having surveyed over 300 HLTAs in 2014, it was found that little or no further career development had been provided by the government; presenting concerns for both the teachers and children they supported (Graves and Williams, 2016). Support staff did not see the intended progression in their careers materialising. TAs, especially HLTAs, found that their role was becoming stagnant, in spite of the promises made by government policies (Graves, 2013). HLTAs had believed that this role would be developed, yet were ultimately left feeling trapped, perceiving their identities to be compromised and disadvantaged, with teacher roles being allowed to develop, which often caused friction between teachers and TAs (Graves, 2013; Collins and Simco, 2006).

TAs found the work they were expected to do, under the requirements of the new government policies, difficult and stressful, particularly when the nature of the work involved more of a teaching role than a supporting role (Collins and Simco, 2006). The professionalization process was so fluid and often arbitrary that there could be a significant role-drift, such as TAs thinking they needed to act like teachers since their role was ill-defined with insufficient definition or demarcation in policy. TAs who had previously worked only with small groups of children were expected to work with whole classes and to engage further with the planning and differentiation of lessons and the assessment of pupils' work. Although these aspects of the TAs work were to be overseen by the teacher, there was an expectation that TAs would also attend planning sessions which necessarily took place before or after school hours, times when TAs were not paid to work (Collins and Simco, 2006; Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010). Such expectations caused dilemmas, as, for example, attending meetings to engage with the processes of planning and assessment would enable them to share their ideas, resulting in feelings of empowerment and successful collaboration, yet they would not be paid for this work (Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010). TAs were often expected to assist in a wide range of situations in school, resulting in a fragmented work pattern, working with a range of different

children and different teachers, for which they felt insufficiently trained, and were unable to reflect upon or evaluate their work effectively (Collins and Simco, 2006).

Role confusion exacerbated by the introduction of the National Strategies (National Literacy Strategy introduced in 1998; National Numeracy Strategy introduced in 1999), and the requirements of the National Agreement (DfES, 2003), together with the increase in the number of children being diagnosed with SEN, saw an influx in the recruitment of support staff in schools (Blatchford et al, 2011; Edmond and Price, 2009). This led to the designation of new 'associate professional' roles, such as 'cover supervisors', 'learning mentors' and 'parent support advisors', as well as HLTAs. Thus boundaries became increasingly blurred (Edmond and Price, 2009).

Following the introduction and implementation of the documents 'Raising standards and tackling workload: a national agreement' (DfES, 2003) and 'Remodelling the school workforce' (Ofsted, 2005), the role of the TA underwent significant changes which were instrumental in contributing to the de-professionalisation of teaching (Graves, 2014; Galton and McBeath, 2010).

### **3.2 The changing nature of teachers' work**

The employment of unqualified staff to supervise whole classes as part of 'Raising standards and tackling workload: a national agreement' (DfES, 2003) was significant in bringing the status of the teaching profession into question (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). Furthermore, the remodelling of the workforce which sought to dismantle and reconstitute the work, legitimising the use of temporary contracts, produced a level of confusion over job descriptors which encouraged employers to seek commercial solutions (Parker, 2015). The marketisation of education was heralded by the introduction of schemes of work, designed on the one hand to make teachers' lives' easier, but on the other, reducing teacher autonomy, particularly in relation to curriculum design (Ball, 2003; Hargreaves, 2000; Parker, 2015).

Prior to the National Agreement (DfES, 2003), the teaching workforce began to diminish, causing the Blair government to curtail this trend by promoting 'recognition of teachers' positive contributions'. The government response to the diminishing workforce was to introduce new system of 'rewards'. A Green Paper (HMSO, 1998) introduced a series of changes, including the introduction of the Advanced Skills Teachers (AST) model, in which teachers with a particularly recognised subject specialism would share their knowledge within their schools and beyond, receiving

remuneration in return. Head teachers and aspiring head teachers were given opportunities to train for the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) through the new National College for Teaching Leadership (NCTL). The Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) was introduced for people who had already pursued careers outside teaching and wanted to teach, through a fast-track initiative consisting of employment-based teacher training.

The Green Paper (HMSO, 1998) introduced a new training framework for trainee teachers, a new statutory professional body, the General Teaching Council (GTC), and TAs were to be formally recognised for their contribution. Experienced classroom teachers were given the opportunity to increase their incremental pay by exceeding the performance pay threshold and entering the new Upper Pay Spine, through the production of a portfolio of evidence of their own achievements and those of the children they taught. These innovations brought about by the Blair government, which appeared to be a positive enhancement to the teaching profession and education as a whole, were favourably greeted by Doug McAvoy, the General Secretary of the NUT in 1998 (HMSO, 1998, p 38).

The introduction of new roles under the New Labour government gave rise to new career paths which also included trainees on the Teach First route into teaching (Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010). Teach First was a commercial initiative which allowed graduates gaining first class honours degrees to spend six weeks training to teach in order to work in secondary schools in deprived areas. The changes to the nature of teachers' roles in the government documents had the potential for a positive outcome regarding the development of teachers' professionalism. Teachers would have been able to show their adaptation to change as evidence of their developing professionalism. Yet large numbers of teachers continued to leave the profession in spite of the instigation of the new rewards (Illingworth, 2007), resulting in the independent consultants, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), being tasked with investigating this phenomenon. PwC found that the profession was losing valuable teachers because they were spending two-thirds of their time on non-teaching related activities (DfES, 2003, p 1). It was due to these findings that the government documents were introduced (DfES, 2003; Ofsted, 2005), acknowledging the excellence of current teachers and school leaders, and identifying excessive workload as the most significant negative factor influencing the impact of recruitment and retention of teachers.



The influential documents which heralded the pivotal transformation of teacher professionalism, 'Raising standards and tackling workload: a national agreement' (DfES, 2003), and 'Remodelling the school workforce' (Ofsted, 2005), promoted optimism. Some teachers' work, which was essentially considered to be non-teaching work, would be reallocated to other adults, such as clerical staff and TAs, allowing teachers to concentrate on the work of teaching. In order for teachers to fulfil their roles in the light of the changing nature of society, the government expressed its intention to deploy support staff (DfES, 2003, p2), identifying a 7-point plan to alleviate the 'burden' of increasing workload for teachers, such as excessive paperwork and bureaucratic processes, endeavouring to provide a 'reasonable work-life balance' (DfES, 2003, p2). The Agreement introduced the notion of allowing guaranteed time for teachers for planning, preparing and assessing (PPA) work to maintain pupil progress during the course of a school day, recognising this work as necessary and, up to this point, having been executed during weekends and evenings (DfES, 2003, p 9). Furthermore, Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Education under the New Labour government, set out a plan to improve teaching by raising it to a Masters level profession as evidenced in 'The Children's Plan' (DCSF, 2006), which was introduced to continue improvements as set out in previous governmental policies (DfES, 2003; Ofsted, 2005). Although some teachers had already achieved Masters level qualifications, Balls encouraged serving teachers, particularly NQTs, and student teachers, to study for a relevant Masters to support his vision.

However, the demarcation of roles was unclear and children were often confused by the new roles. Yet teachers continued to be deeply committed to their profession, with a great desire to make changes to enhance to quality of their day to day professional lives and subsequently the lives of the children they teach (Gunter and Rayner, 2006; Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010). Some teachers perceived these initiatives as divisive rather than a positive contribution to the profession. Teachers themselves had to compete against each other for recognition and go through more rigorous scrutiny to achieve the promotions offered by the government. As well as the competitive elements introduced by policy, teachers were exposed to further government scrutiny via the new GTC. In spite of the new government initiatives to persuade teachers to stay in the profession, fears that the traditional heart of teachers' work would be taken by less qualified staff became widespread, as new 'associate professional' roles were established (Edmond and Price, 2009). The onset of 'associate professional' roles heralded the decline of the notion of autonomy in the profession for many teachers as the professionalisation of unqualified

staff rose. Teachers still maintained that the changes, albeit presented as rewards and solutions to the problem of excessive workload, were divisive and not real solutions to the issues they faced (Edmond and Price, 2009). They continued to state that teacher professionalism was under threat.

The new government standards for teachers introduced by the workforce remodelling agenda and enshrined in the Performance Management requirements (TDA, 2007a) and Professional Standards for Teachers (TDA, 2007a), were considered by some to be a positive step. New career paths had been introduced and a common language for all education professionals had been provided so that teachers could demonstrate their ability to adapt and develop. Trainee teachers would be able to understand the formative and summative nature of the assessments in their training (Loughland and Ellis, 2016). However, the new government standards focused squarely on what teachers did rather than acknowledging them as professionals. Assessment against the new standards conjured up notions of measurement, control and compulsion to be publically accountable (Goepel, 2012). Government oversight became increasingly significant in the wake of the introduction of these standards (Parker, 2015; Wilkins, 2011; Goepel, 2012).

Qualified teachers were seeing a reduction in their opportunities for work, and many teachers were being forced to leave their chosen profession, significantly supply teachers, because they were not able to secure paid teaching work, as support assistants were systematically taking on teachers' work (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). Concurrent with changes in TA roles, there was a reinforced sense of de-professionalisation of teaching which had direct impact on the career opportunities of qualified teachers. The manifestation of the expansion of the TAs role was considered by some academics to be detrimental to the teaching profession (Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010).

The imposition of government requirements did not convey the effect that a set of agreed intentions would have (Evans, 2011; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). Whilst education reforms are generally intended to promote renewal and improvement, these reforms were not generally found to be beneficial (Day and Smethem, 2009), especially as economic and social factors had been disregarded.

### **3.3 Issues concerning the re-construction of teamwork**

The role changes and tensions that occurred in the wake of government policy impacted upon teamwork in the classroom, reminiscent of the 1960s and 1970s experiment of team teaching, when teachers worked together in one classroom to

deliver learning - an initiative that was unsustainable (Vincett et al, 2005). This was due to complex factors, particularly the fact that teachers have a need for privacy and independence (Vincett, et al, 2005; Hargreaves, 1998). With government requirements for support staff to take on extra work which had previously been executed by teachers, the role of the TA had shifted dramatically. The issue of demarcation, roles, responsibilities, shared goals and expectations was nowhere more evident than in the primary sector which was the subject of dedicated reform measures geared towards professionalization in that particular sector (Graves, 2013; Vincett et al, 2005; Blatchford et al, 2011).

The rise in the employment of TAs to take over repetitive, routine and clerical tasks from teachers served only to reinforce perceptions of dilution of their professional status (Gunter, 2008). Although this assistance of TAs was initially welcomed by teachers as indirect support to children's learning (Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010), this changed when the role of the TA evolved, providing a more direct approach rather than additional support (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). The role of the TA, which was more extensive in the primary rather than the secondary sector, created an eruption of confusion and tensions (Payler and Locke, 2013; Graves, 2014; Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010).

Tensions began to mount within the teaching profession even before the documentation heralding the new government education reforms had been introduced, as the neo-liberal government education agenda regarding professionalization had been perceived as negatively affecting teachers and teacher educators alike (Hall and Schultz, 2003). Some academics voiced concerns, fearing that de-professionalisation would occur through a process of de-skilling, work intensification, and the substitution of others to do the work of teachers (Stevenson, 2007).

Some teachers believed that the boundary between teachers and TAs should be sacrosanct, fearing that the professionalisation of TAs would allow them to become 'quasi teachers', resulting in the loss of more teaching jobs. Teachers had been fearful at the onset of the government policy changes, feeling insecure about their professional status. In spite of the support that teachers were given by TAs, they continued to experience a heavy workload (Stevenson, 2007; Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010; Bruton, 2013). However, teachers still had the ultimate responsibility of high stakes, high pressure work and, when asked, stated that they used to welcome the mundane tasks, such as photocopying, which provided a break from

the intensity of their high stakes workload, and enabled them to recoup their energy (Stevenson, 2007; Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010).

Tensions mounted as qualified teachers spent more time on planning, recording, reporting and devoting increasing amounts of their time to administrative work. The nature of teacher professionalism was increasingly perceived as under threat, due to the decreasing amount of time that teachers spent on their work with their children (Pupala et al, 2016). Whilst classroom practice had been the acclaimed focus for raising the professional status of teachers through the government initiatives, in reality it was the bureaucratic accountability instead that was of greater importance (Pupala et al, 2016; Goepel, 2012).

Despite indications from government sources that the symbiosis between teachers and TAs was working well, both groups of the workforce declined to concur with this assumption. The management and development of TAs became an issue because they were poorly paid and largely untrained (Galton and McBeath, 2010). They had been given roles commensurate with a higher degree of pedagogical knowledge which needed to be addressed, particularly in the light of their development needs (Butt and Lance, 2009; Rubie-Davies et al, 2010; Webster et al, 2013). TAs assumed a variety of tasks which included such roles as general classroom assistants, learning support assistants, special support assistants, special needs assistants, and specialist teaching assistants, the latter category functioning in roles such as bilingual support staff or those who supported children with hearing or visual impairments (Ofsted, 2005). However, in the absence of adequate training or support, they were regarded as incapable of delivering tasks at the appropriate level of expertise, a status which seemed to be reflected in their poor levels of pay.

The 'Remodelling the school workforce' (Ofsted, 2005) report had summarised the progress of the 'Raising standards and tackling workload: a national agreement' (DfES, 2003) document, based on the inspection of 79 schools in England in a variety of contexts. It reported that some schools were concerned about the use of teaching assistants covering whole classes, particularly in the context of the 'deterioration in behaviour' and that 'individual pupils will not receive the same level of attention' (Ofsted, 2005, p8). Further tensions arose between teachers and TAs because additional reports stated that children's learning had been suffering as a direct result of TA intervention, thus calling for better deployment of TAs to ensure a greater positive impact on children's learning (Webster et al, 2011; Webster et al, 2013; Cremin, et al, 2005; Butt and Lance, 2009; Rubie-Davies et al, 2010; Wilson

and Bedford, 2008). The quality of interactions between TAs and the children in their care, particularly with a focus on the development of children's thinking, had been contested, when compared to that of teachers' interactions, which were of a higher quality (Rubie-Davies et al, 2010). The report from a significant study into the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) also fuelled tensions, concluding that the impact of TA interaction with pupils had had a negative effect on their learning and academic progress (Blatchford et al, 2009; Webster et al, 2011). Children in some primary schools were also able to differentiate between teachers and TAs, particularly when both were instrumental in delivering the curriculum, citing differences in their training, vocation and responsibility as indicators (Fraser and Meadows, 2008).

### **3.4 Changes to Early Years education**

Concurrent with the National Agreement (DfES, 2003) a new division of labour between teachers and support staff was created by the introduction of the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) in 2007. The document, 'Supporting Families in the Foundation Years' (DfE, 2011d), heralded a new status, launched in 2007 by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), entitled the Early Years Practitioner (EYP), for which the EYPS was a desirable requirement to work with young children. An EYP could aspire to the lead role in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum, which was usually delivered through children centres and nurseries. However, in practice, not just leaders but all those involved in delivering the EYFS became known generically as practitioners, although their range of expertise varied from those who were barely qualified to those with QTS (Simpson, 2010; Graves, 2014). Effectively, teachers and support staff who worked with children assumed a common professional status through the designation of EYP. Rather than assisting qualified teachers, the role of support staff became conflated with 'qualified teacher' as the appropriate adult (Rose and Rogers, 2012). Opportunities for the employment of qualified teachers reduced significantly while those for EYPs expanded in these areas. In light of budget cuts hard-pressed providers took the opportunities afforded by lower pay for EYPs by increasing the ratio of EYPs to qualified teachers on the payroll. Qualified teachers in the Early Years were losing work in favour of poorly paid and untrained assistants which impacted on the quality of teaching enjoyed by the children who were now engaging with lesser qualified adults in the classroom (Galton and McBeath, 2010; Edmond and Price, 2009).

In 2013, the qualification of Early Years Teacher (EYT) was introduced (NCTL, 2013). This qualification acknowledged a set of standards similar to those already present in the standards documentation for HLTAs (DfE, 2012b). The intention of

this new status was explained in so far as EYTs would be concerned primarily with the care of babies and young children. Although the term 'teacher' appeared in the title of the award, unlike the award of QTS, this award was not transferable to enable an EYT to teach all age groups. Indeed, the document clearly stated that EYT status would be awarded to graduates who worked with children 'from birth to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)' (NCTL, 2013, p.2). This new role led to further confusion and tensions between teachers with QTS and those without (Payler and Locke, 2013; Graves, 2014; Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010).

In the absence of an effective model for partnership, the education workforce was being increasingly split. The effects were particularly apparent in the field of nursery work which became highly politicised, due to the focus and attention it attracted because of the disproportionate qualifications and pay afforded to workers in this sector (Osgood, 2009; Simpson, 2010). The professionalisation of nursery workers was debated by academics, claiming that the regulation and control of EYPs was in line with post-structuralist theory, which accentuates the differences between perceptions of dominant and subservient workers (Osgood, 2006, in Simpson, 2010).

In viewing the changes through a lens of activist theory, it has been argued that EYPs were empowered to define their own roles and professionalism with the fluid environment that emerged. Some took a lead in scoping out their own role as role makers, some took their lead from other actors as role takers, while others withdrew into more comfortable positions as role avoiders and role distancers (Miller, 2008, in Simpson, 2010). This is how claims that the installation of the EYPS did not contribute significantly to the facilitation of change in the Early Years were explained. Osgood (2009) has gone so far as to cite a 'crisis in childcare' as a means of subjugating nursery workers through policy reforms. Essentially academics were suggesting that rather than having positions imposed through policy, alternative constructions of professionalism could be produced from within the Early Years sector in consultation with those working in the sector.

The EYP and EYT initiatives were intended to accelerate the process of workforce reform, but only served to reinforce the notion that qualified teachers and their work were being undervalued. Teachers believed that these interventions were lowering the standards of teaching and learning, and consolidating the erosion of the teaching profession. Although the principle of support in the classroom was legitimate, in the absence of guidance as to how professional partnership would work on the ground, the harmonious co-existence necessary to the bedrock of effective partnership in the classroom, remained elusive (Payler and Locke, 2013).

## Conclusions

The workforce reforms, introduced between 2003 and 2013, have endeavoured to align teacher professionalism and the professionalisation of support staff. However, the essential outcome of alignment has been to blend and blur distinctions within the workforce which have in turn engendered at least the perception of and possibly the reality of de-professionalising and undermining the former in favour of upgrading the work of the latter.

This chapter has argued that the introduction of the professionalization of support staff in schools had a detrimental effect upon teachers' work and their sense of professionalism. The work of support staff had been formalised to comply with government standards, which enabled them to be measured and controlled, along with teachers. TAs began to take over teachers' substantive work, the outcome of which was that teachers' jobs became scarce, particularly in the case of supply teachers. Teacher workload increased as a result of having to prepare work for TAs to deliver to pupils in their place. However, children's learning proved to be suffering as a consequence of having lessons delivered by support staff who were not adequately trained in behaviour management techniques and subject knowledge. Furthermore, in spite of poor quality lesson delivery by TAs, it was the teachers with whom the responsibility of high stakes accountability remained. Support staff, however, complained that they had not been given the training they had been promised to enable them to do this work.

Although support staff had been promised government support to enable career development and enhancement, this never materialised. They cited this lack of support as the reason why they did not feel able to assist teachers and children appropriately themselves. This frustration added to the difficulties that occurred as teachers and support staff began to work in teams, particularly in early years settings, where there was confusion over the titles and roles of the members of staff. Working in teams was not the harmonious experience that the government had anticipated, and the division of labour was blurred due to the lack of demarcation between roles. The government reforms had potential to foster positive outcomes and enhance teaching and learning, but due to the absence of agreed intentions between the government and teachers, there was no opportunity for teachers to show their professional competence.

The next chapter explores the complexity of teachers' identity and sense of self. The literature focuses upon the impact of government policy and the emotional work of teaching, citing some of the policy moments which have indicated significant changes to teachers' roles and their understanding of the concept of professional identity.

The neo-liberal agenda has been viewed as a fundamental challenge to teachers' sense of identity resulting in negative consequences fuelled by a sense of isolation, often exacerbated by school politics and the seemingly perennial debate around classroom control. In acknowledging that the lives of teachers are complex and subject to social and political debates, the need for their agency in negotiating and challenging the discourses of accountability and reform is reinforced. This acknowledgement also assists in developing new discourses that align with authentic personal and professional identities.

Teachers may seek empowerment in order to regain an authentic sense of identity through opportunities such as individual professional development and research-based practice. In addressing the issue of teacher identity, the next chapter is structured around a discussion of the transformational changes necessary to allow teachers to re-construct their identities; professional identity and the potential impact of professional development; the influence of the notion of teacher identity on early career teachers; the transition of teaching from the discourse of 'emotional professional' to 'rational technician' and the conflict between teachers' role and identity.



## **Chapter 4 – Identity: the changing nature of teacher identity and the impact of the emotional work of teaching**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the complexity of teachers' identity and sense of self. The literature focuses upon the impact of government policy and the emotional work of teaching, citing some of the policy moments which have indicated significant changes to teachers' roles and their understanding of the concept of professional identity.

The construction of teacher identity is a constantly shifting concept (Zembylas, 2003a; 2003b) which has been widely debated this century due to the nature of the changes in the workplace, particularly those initiated by government policy and workforce reform (Gatimu and Reynolds, 2013; Buchanan, 2015; Wegwert, 2014; Bradbury, 2012; Zembylas, 2005; Sadovnikova et al, 2016; Gray, 2006; Day, 2002). Some teachers argue that the passion, dedication and commitment to the children they teach are the most important factors defining their identity (Kim, 2013). Day (2002) cites factors such as 'motivation, efficacy, commitment, job satisfaction and effectiveness' as central to the notion of teacher identity, articulating these as key areas which have been influenced by the reforms. Prytula and Weiman (2012) support Coldron and Smith's conceptual framework modelling identity, derived from four traditions (1999, in Prytula and Weiman, 2012), comprising 'craft, moral, artistic and scientific' in defining teaching and areas of identity in teaching.

In an attempt to provide conceptual clarity, and in order to differentiate between the terms 'identity' and 'sense of self', I have initially drawn upon the work of Day (2002) and Kim (2013), mentioned in the previous paragraph. Although emotions hold a strong sense of place in both these terms, 'identity' is perceived as how teachers are seen by external agencies, while their 'sense of self' is purely dependent upon their internal perceptions. Evans (2011, p856) differentiates between these concepts when she defines the 'attitudinal' sub-component of professionalism, namely 'perceptual', which incorporates external 'perceptions' and 'self-perception'. Although the application of 'identity' can be attributed from an external agent, 'self-perception' or a person's 'sense of self' can only be determined by the person her/himself. With regards to the term 'identity', Day (2002) discusses teacher identity, citing factors that are central to the notion of teacher identity which can be, and have been, influenced by external forces. Teachers' identities can shift due to the demanding nature of their work in the context of educational reforms. Identity

can be shaped via external perceptions and is subjective, dependent upon those considering the individual or group. I use the term 'identity' to denote a generalised perception of a teacher's or teachers' experiences as shaped by external agencies, in order to interpret how teachers define themselves.

Kim (2013) cites qualities that focus on what teachers present in order to identify themselves as teachers. These qualities – passion, dedication and commitment - remain steadfast, irrespective of external forces, yet teachers can be pushed to their limits when they are not able to separate themselves from their work. A teacher's 'sense of self' does not require affirmation from external agencies, nor is it subjective. There is no audience to judge, nor can there be any quantification or measurement taking place. I have taken into account the difficulties that defining the term 'sense of self' can present, as it is often assumed or inferred by outside agencies that the terms 'identity' and 'sense of self' are successfully interchangeable. Having been a teacher myself, I believe that I am in a strong position to identify my own sense of self as a teacher, though I am aware that I cannot speak for all or other teachers unless they were to stipulate the identities they hold. This being the case, I use the term 'sense of self' to describe how and what a teacher might feel, believe and/or aspire to in terms of their passion, dedication and commitment to their work and the children they teach.

Hall and McGinity (2015) argue that the marketisation and managerialist nature of neo-liberal reforms in teaching have caused teacher identity to change in order to conform to the performative agenda. The development of teacher identity has been constrained due to the subversive agenda of neo-liberal policy which has re-contextualised teacher identity, constituting teacher choices as accommodating, embracing or resisting the changes (Hall and McGinity, 2015). Sadovnikova et al (2016) similarly present professional identity as being in crisis due to teachers' lack of control over their professional activity, situations and prospects. This focus on the contemporary landscape of education exposes the influence of politics in the form of neo-liberalist philosophy which has taken control of the profession.

Against a backdrop of rapid government reforms and continual policy changes, teachers have worked hard to make the constantly changing manifestations of the National Curriculum palatable for the children they teach (Connell, 2009; Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). Moore and Clarke (2016) argue that delivering on policy initiatives which go against their beliefs has negatively impacted upon teachers' identity which remains firmly attached to a more traditional notion of their own professionalism based on fundamental values. Furthermore, the rigorous testing and accountability measures in

place have heightened the incidence of anxiety within the profession where the fear of failure now dominates (Hutchings, 2015). These constraints and policy changes have conspired to frustrate and undermine good teachers whose professionalism is perceived as being at best, compromised, and at worst, eroded (Kirk and Wall, 2010, Acker, 1999). Continued criticism and attacks on the beliefs and the execution of teachers' work has also engendered a sense of shame among many teachers (Zembylas, 2005). The radical changes brought about by the National Agreement (DfES, 2003) and the Remodelling Agenda (Ofsted, 2005) meant that teachers felt as though the human element of their work had been taken from them, resulting in feelings of failure and hopelessness and a continual sense of vulnerability (Woods and Jeffrey, 2002; Zembylas, 2003b, 2005). The assaults on teachers' autonomy, the constant surveillance and the pressure to perform have side-lined personal qualities and vocational commitment, leaving teachers feeling disempowered, guilty, lacking in confidence, unheard, not trusted, traumatised and lacking the respect and dignity of society that they once had (Kipps-Vaughan, 2013; Zembylas, 2005).

In summary, the neo-liberal agenda has been viewed as a fundamental challenge to teachers' sense of identity resulting in negative consequences fuelled by a sense of isolation, often exacerbated by school politics and the seemingly perennial debate around classroom control (Wegwert, 2014). In acknowledging that the lives of teachers are complex and subject to social and political debates, the need for their agency in negotiating and challenging the discourses of accountability and reform is reinforced. This acknowledgement also assists in developing new discourses that align with authentic personal and professional identities (Zembylas, 2003a; Buchanan, 2015). Teachers may seek empowerment in order to regain an authentic sense of identity through opportunities such as individual professional development and research-based practice. In addressing the issue of teacher identity, this chapter is structured around a discussion of the transformational changes necessary to allow teachers to re-construct their identities; professional identity and the potential impact of professional development; the influence of the notion of teacher identity on early career teachers; the transition of teaching from the discourse of 'emotional professional' to 'rational technician' and the conflict between teachers' role and identity.

#### **4.1 Transformational change and identity re-construction**

The process of constant re-construction of identity is necessary as a teacher's career progresses. The discourses of transformational change – the process which aligns teachers' work with current neo-liberal policy as manifested within the school setting –

compel teachers to continually re-construct their identities (Wood and Jeffery, 2002; Zembylas, 2003b). Those who had established their careers before the introduction of the National Curriculum have found the changes most challenging, and the impact of Ofsted inspections have caused trauma and self-doubt (Wood and Jeffery, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2006; Moore and Clarke, 2016). Many teachers have been fearful of re-constructing their identities because of the increased necessity for public accountability, which in turn has left them feeling constrained by the lack of autonomy they had once experienced (Day, 2002). Prior to the National Curriculum, the Plowden Report (1967) afforded the profession a strong sense of identity and self-worth as a teacher, allowing for their social and personal identities to be based on a synonymous set of values, which included holism, humanism and vocationalism (Wood and Jeffery, 2002; Gunter, 2008; Kirk and Wall, 2010).

Gray (2006) argues that since the Education Reform Act (1988), tensions have been mounting between 'prospective and retrospective' identities. Teachers' professional status and vocation has also come into conflict (Gray, 2006), which is a stark contrast to the liberal era of the 1980s, known as the 'Secret Garden' (Parker, 2015, p457) and the 'Golden Age' (Whitty, 2006). During this time, teachers viewed the child as central to their work, building on inter-personal skills, communicative relationships and mutual respect, between them, the children and their parents with whom they work, and their colleagues (Kim, 2013; Warwick, 2014; Swann et al, 2010). The child-centred principles and commitment to teaching formed the basis of the notion of a 'good teacher' (Wood and Jeffery, 2002; Whitty, 2006). Teachers had a strong emotional dedication to their work and a strong emotional and political investment in the work they did; their integrity remained complete and they felt a sense of trust by the government, as exemplified in government policies, and by society (Whitty, 2006). A teacher's identity was, therefore, linked into their own concept of their sense of self and their social identity.

It is argued that the challenges that teachers have had to face since the introduction of the National Curriculum have eroded not only their sense of identity, but their rights and opportunities (Woods and Jeffrey, 2002). The inevitable changes to education in response to social change had previously evolved through a child-centred approach, where teachers had been trusted to use their professional judgement to enable children to learn. However, the National Curriculum brought with it an inconsistency between social identity and self-concept resulting in confusion and self-doubt (Woods and Jeffrey, 2002). The changes meant that teachers had to reconsider their beliefs, their values and their roles in the changing environment, whilst audit accountability, marketisation, management systems, performativity, efficiency and high-consequence risks took precedence (Woods

and Jeffrey, 2002; Connell, 2009). The sharp contrast from earlier times meant that teachers were assigned a new social identity, which the policy makers constructed; teachers' professional judgements were over-ridden by the pressures of monitoring, inspection, standardisation, the marketisation and management of schools, and the new forms of assessment (Connell, 2009; Gunter and Rayner, 2007). Although it appeared that the new government policies were intended to improve standards in education rather than wilfully attack teachers, they perceived that their beliefs and judgements were being questioned and their sense of vocation undermined, resulting in their former self-identity being challenged by their new social identity. The notion of a 'good teacher' was to be achieved through developing competencies, subject expertise, collaboration and supervision, in the belief that it is actually possible to reach perfection through audit accountability (Connell, 2009; Gunter and Rayner, 2007). This notion of a 'good teacher' has become entangled with the complex notions of teacher identity, particularly since early career teachers will aspire to become a 'good teacher' by fitting in with the school culture (Reynolds in Day et al, 2006).

The intertwining of 'self' and personal identity within the work that teachers do underpins the argument that teaching demands a great deal of personal investment and emotional labour (Day et al, 2006; Nias, 1996; Zembylas, 2003b). Teacher identity is 'deeply embedded in one's personal biography' which advocates for a holistic perspective to be maintained (Bukor, 2015). A teacher's sense of self is intrinsically linked with social constructions of identity and society's opinions of teachers, impacting on everyone concerned with the process of education (Day et al, 2006; Nias, 1996). Consequently, it is difficult for a committed teacher to ignore the needs of their pupils (Nias, 1996; Cooper, 2000). Structure, namely the external influences that affect teachers, and agency, namely the ability to pursue the goals that teachers value, are often in conflict. While teachers may from time to time view external structural forces as in conflict with their agency in prioritising pupil needs, the 'professional self' is not static. Rather it evolves through stages of 'becoming' (Zembylas, 2005) and through changes in self-image and self-esteem (Kelchtermans, 1996). Instability undermines self-esteem, engendering negative self-image and vulnerability in a performative environment, thereby threatening a healthy sense of professional identity (Kelchtermans, 1996; O'Connor, 2008; Blatchford, et al, 2009). Career progression is vital to maintaining all aspects of professional identity but shifting structures have made it difficult for teachers to hold aspirations and hopes of promotion within their careers, as the shifting structures have undermined the traditional lines of progress, and teachers have found themselves staying in the same job for longer

than they had originally intended (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010; Gunter and Rayner, 2007).

Having been demoralised by the reforms of the neo-liberal policy agenda, teachers' job motivation has been greatly influenced by negative feelings surrounding their self-image and self-esteem, which has had a subsequent negative effect upon their ability to perform tasks appropriately for the new job, thus distorting their intentions for future success in other teaching roles. Agency has also been difficult to achieve under these circumstances. Teachers have become passive as the feelings of increased vulnerability have escalated, and they have become more willing to conform, so that their teaching has become more conservative, considering creativity and risk-taking unsafe (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009; Zembylas, 2005, 2007). It is also likely that such feelings have led teachers to retire early or leave the profession completely (Blatchford, et al, 2009). Professional identity is never static. It is shaped by structural change and external forces, such as new roles. The structural changes have been relentless in education to the degree that teachers' sense of purpose and self is constantly in a state of flux (Day et al, 2006). A teacher's personal experiences, both past and present, will combine with their beliefs and values about themselves as teachers. Complex notions of teacher professional identity, therefore, affect a teacher's motivation, commitment and job satisfaction, leading to them questioning their sense of purpose and sense of self (Zembylas, 2003b).

#### **4.2 Professional identity and professional development**

Some argue that professional identity can be shaped through empowerment provided by Continued Professional Development (CPD). However, the challenge has been the impact of government policy and attendant school requirements which have limited opportunities for and distracted teachers from reflective practice (Connell, 2009; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009; Gatimu and Reynolds, 2013). As 'reflective practitioners', teachers are encouraged to take control of their own learning and develop a more robust approach to their work, negotiating government policies and the changing nature of teachers' roles through knowledge creation, whilst also becoming managers and delegating work to their designated support assistants (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009; Zembylas, 2007). Teachers are supported through a variety of CPD initiatives to shape their own professional identity through reflective practice. Some researchers have gone so far as to suggest that teachers should become practitioner researchers, using their learning in the classroom as a tool to enable them to regain empowerment and confidence (McGregor and Cartwright, 2011; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009), possibly leading to a formal qualification, such as the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) which was developed

as a response to The Children's Plan (DCSF, 2006). However, the MTL qualification - like the desire to raise the status of teaching by elevating it from a graduate profession to a Masters level profession – was short-lived (Edmond and Price, 2009). The Children's Plan (DCSF, 2006), which had been introduced under the New Labour government, was discontinued by the subsequent Conservative/ Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010.

Evidence –based practice is cited as an alternative form of practitioner research to promote empowerment and identity (Mockler, 2011; Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2006; Gatimu and Reynolds, 2013). Many teachers who engage with such practices experience success, and since teachers are acknowledged as the single most important resource affecting children's achievement (Gatimu and Reynolds, 2013) their individual professional development will be high on the government agenda. However, although these proposals work for some teachers, time constraints and depleted energy resources often mean that other teachers struggle to fulfil government's requirements as a priority whilst shouldering the burden of performativity (Connell, 2009; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). Evidence suggests that teachers who are enmeshed within the policy requirements of accountability feel unable to engage with their pupils on a level which enables pupil-focused learning, while those who engage with critical inquiry can enhance pupils' learning primarily through the use of open-ended questioning and classroom discussions (Gatimu and Reynolds, 2013).

Notwithstanding relative success or otherwise of interventions discussed, teacher identity is an unstable entity which can change, depending on the stages of a teacher's career and the teacher's concerns at any given time (Day, et al, 2006; MacLure, 1993; Zembylas, 2003a). Because teachers' lives are in a state of flux, constantly responding to structural change, changes in their own agency and their agency in relation to the collective, both in their personal and professional contexts, their identities can be fragmented (Day, et al, 2006; Zembylas, 2005). The most significant factor to influence a teacher's identity is internal structural change, which may be seen, for example, in the teacher in the latter years of their career, who harks back to better times. When this collides with external structural changes, it can result in emotional damage, leading to long periods of stress-related illness, early retirement or resignation (MacLure, 1993; Illingworth, 2007).

Teachers who are not secure in their identities as teachers are not as committed to teaching as a career. This may be a factor in the recruitment and retention of early career teachers which is currently a cause for concern (Blatchford, et al, 2009). The constant changing nature of structure, both through government policy and school management,

combined with the perceived need to suppress agency and voice can potentially have greater impact on the daily lives of early career teachers who feel less confident about voicing their agency. It has been argued that an efficient mentoring system could enable early career teachers to co-construct secure professional identities which would foster a healthy commitment to their career as teachers (Reynolds in Day et al, 2006; Zembylas, 2005). Mentoring can be beneficial in fostering resilience in early career teachers, particularly if the institutional discourses within the school are constructive (Sannino, 2010; Moore, 2013).

### **4.3 Early career teachers and identity**

During the early years of their careers, teachers formulate their professional identities. They develop attitudes, values and perspectives which remain with them during the greater part of their careers (Tarpey, 2016). Some trainee teachers will begin to develop a sense of their professional identity through working in 'communities of practice' in subject areas (Woolhouse and Cochrane, 2015). Once they are trained and have secured a job, early career teachers benefit from the support of a strong mentor in their school. This support can impact significantly upon their developing professional identities (Woolhouse and Cochrane, 2015; Pearce and Morrison, 2011; Uitto et al, 2015; Morrison, 2013). These new teachers not only find that working with other teachers can be helpful in enabling them to form their own sense of professional identity, they also become aware that co-creating discourses with more experienced teachers helps to build their resilience (Pearce and Morrison, 2011; Morrison, 2013; Uitto et al, 2015). The schools and settings where early career teachers begin their work play a significant role in the acquisition of new professional identities. Some schools may offer more challenging environments, yet they still enable teachers' identities to emerge (Morrison, 2013). Morrison (2013) describes possible trajectories of teacher identity in early career teachers as 'emergent', 'tenuous' and 'distressed', though he argues that significant others within the school could have a great influence upon the new teacher's identity, or by contrast, a possible early exit from the profession. Emotionally significant relationships within the micro-political context also allow early career teachers to recognise aspects of their own embryonic teacher identities (Uitto et al, 2015).

Early career teachers, although initially having little agency, can differentiate between their personal and professional selves, but as their careers progress, they begin to combine the personal self and the professional self, which can be affected by a sense of belonging to the profession through their school and the relationships they have formed with the pupils in their class (Nias, 1989). As personal and professional selves merge the sense of



belonging to the profession through the school community and the relationships formed with pupils in class assumes greater significance. Job satisfaction and the personal satisfaction of a job well done may derive from this sense of community, but teachers may also become more vulnerable to the exigencies of the community as time goes on requiring ever increasing levels of emotional investment (Hargreaves, 1998; Nias, 1996; Cooper, 2004; Kelchtermans, 2005).

Agency is not easy for early career teachers to achieve. They are compelled to adjust their expectations in order to form an identity by building upon experiences not only in their own schools, but also in the wider community (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Nias, 1989; MacLure, 1993). Agency does become easier for them as their confidence grows. Early career teachers will generally be seeking to 'blend in' to be able to pass their induction period. By doing this, they will be conforming to the norms of their school (Zembylas, 2003a). The new teachers will have made a conscious decision to allow their 'personal voice' to be subsumed by the voice of 'an objective and distanced voice' in order to pass their induction period. This resonates with the notion of 'multiple selves' which occur throughout a teacher's career (Cooper and Olson, 1996). As these new teachers grow in confidence, they begin to question the structures and vocalise their concerns about the dominant discourses. It is at this point that they will begin to assert their own agency (Reynolds in Day et al, 2006).

As teachers become more aware of their situations within the structure, many will feel they need to prove that they are committed to their job and to their pupils in order to survive, through adhering to the dominant discourses and discursive practices of their schools (Zembylas, 2005). They engage in extra activity and involvement in their school in order to demonstrate their commitment. This extra-curricular activity is often executed in the hope that they will be able to show that they are taking the job seriously and will therefore be seen as a 'real teacher' and rewarded for being a true professional who cares about the pupils they teach. This behaviour may be interpreted either as a genuine demonstration of investment in the job and therefore greater emotional investment into their personal and professional identity, or as a way of showing openness and willingness to senior management colleagues to ensure security of tenure or promotion (Lortie, in Day et al, 2006; Zembylas, 2003b).

#### **4.4 Transitioning from emotional professional to rational technician**

Teachers' professional identity had significantly changed, shifting the formally long-held perceptions of the autonomous professional to that of mere technician (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). Teacher identity had been concerned not only with their

occupational selves, but also with their pride in the child-centred approaches they use and their holistic view of the education of the child (Kirk and Wall, 2010; Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010; Hargreaves, 1998).

Teachers cannot separate themselves emotionally from the work they do, as their emotional reactions are linked to their perceptions of themselves and others (Bukor, 2015). In discussing the emotional work of teaching, it is important to highlight how the neo-liberal government policy agenda neglects to focus upon the need to consider this important aspect of teachers' work. Furthermore, it can also be a factor that forms the basis of resistance.

In order to conceptualise the emotional work of teaching, Zembylas presents a number of key assumptions:

'Emotions are not private or universal and ...are constructed through language and refer to a wider social life...

'Power relations are inherent in 'emotion talk' and shape the expression of emotions by permitting us to feel some emotions while prohibiting others...

'Using emotions, one can create sites of social and political resistances...

'Finally, it is important to recognise the role of the body in emotional experience...If emotion is understood as corporeal and performative, then the subject appears in a new light, in a way that rejects the individualised psychological self.'

(2003a, p110).

Zembylas (2003a) explores the notions of the construction of emotions through language and the impact of language on the way in which teachers respond. He suggests that teachers could find themselves in situations in school whereby they are compelled to suppress their authentic feelings in order to conform to the normative regime of the institution. By doing this, teachers are subject to the possibility of stress and consequential 'burnout' (Zembylas, 2005). Teachers' professional identities could be strengthened, as well as pupil learning, through the recognition that schools and their cultures need to be less isolating and relationally distant (Wegwert, 2014).

Policy makers have not conceded the value of the emotional investment teachers make, considering this contribution to be 'worthless' (O'Connor, 2008, p121). Furthermore, because the emotional investment that is expected of teachers, not least by themselves, is not taken into account by policy makers, Hargreaves maintains that teachers regularly

suffer from feelings of guilt which often leads to 'burnout' (Hargreaves, 1998).

Paradoxically, the care that teachers give to their pupils is without doubt a significant aspect of their job which ensures that the quality of teaching and learning is high and valued as the core aspect of teachers' professional identity (Hargreaves, 2005; O'Connor, 2008; Kelchtermans, 2009). The sacrificial nature of their work is never acknowledged or articulated by the policy makers, who tacitly expect teachers to fulfil the needs of their pupils and others in the education system whatever the cost to their own wellbeing, their professional integrity and their identity as teachers (O'Connor, 2008; Moore and Clarke, 2016). In a recent study, in which pupils were asked if they were aware of the stress that their teachers were under, their responses revealed that the stress was not apparent, in spite of the long-term nature of teachers being 'stressed and overworked for many years', demonstrating a high level of teacher professionalism in concealing the high levels of stress from the pupils (Hutchings, 2015, p 55).

The lack of recognition in policy terms of the emotional work that teachers do has been compounded by the absence of explicit recognition in academic and professional reports until recent years (Hargreaves, 1998, 2005; Kelchtermans, 1996, 2005; O'Connor, 2008; Zembylas, 2005, 2007). It has been recognised that effectiveness in their work is important to teachers as they identify closely with their profession, resulting in highly charged feelings and emotions (Nias, 1996; Zembylas, 2003b, Hargreaves, 2005). Many teachers have expressed feelings of loneliness, conflict and ambivalence within their schools, caused by bureaucracy and a lack of consultation on the change processes (Day et al, 2007). Thus emotional aspects of teachers' work have been underestimated when planning and adopting significant policy changes in education this century, which have been legion, making the emotional investment needed to manage and accommodate these changes significantly high (Kelchtermans, 2005; Hargreaves, 2005; Cooper, 2004).

The only concession made to the emotional effects that educational change could have on teachers has been the possibility of manipulation and motivation of teachers by managers in a bid to move into the changes with minimum disruption, thus neglecting the human aspect of teaching (Hargreaves, 2005). While policy agenda ignores the emotional labour of teaching, teachers' effective response to pupil needs figures highly in professional identity. Teachers cannot be authentic given the relational distance within their working environment where managers want speedy implementation of changes. Consequently, emotion finds no positive outcome other than it being channelled into resistance. In recent years, teachers have become more accessible to public scrutiny, and therefore more vulnerable, fostering a need to re-establish their autonomy by providing a strong defence,

which may be achieved through working together with parents, communities and social media (Hargreaves, 2000).

The rapid changes brought about by the National Agreement (DfES, 2003) and Remodelling Agenda (Ofsted, 2005) caused teachers' professional identity and roles to become uncertain (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). Teachers were no longer able to identify themselves as autonomous and responsible professionals as had been the case during the implementation of the Plowden Report (1967), but the introduction of social accountability and consumerism had forced teachers to question their professional identity and their sense of purpose (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010; Bruton, 2013; Zembylas, 2007; Gatimu and Reynolds, 2013). They began to feel as though they were transitioning from autonomous professional to technician with no acknowledgement of their professionalism.

#### **4.5 The conflict between teachers' role and 'sense of self'**

As aspects of teachers' work have been brought into question and 'cynical compliance' to government policy has exacerbated confusion between the role and identity of the teacher, severe emotional costs have accrued to individuals within the profession (Bradbury, 2012). Gunter and Rayner (2006) argued that the Remodelling Agenda was not necessarily a response to excessive teacher workload, but rather a means to deregulate the teaching profession. However, by allowing other adults to take over what had traditionally become teachers' work, teachers were parting with core work which could not be retrieved (Gunter and Rayner, 2006).

The language that was used in these government documents was purported to be managerial and corporate, implying that the work of teachers and the expectations of schools could be equated to that of a business model rather than education (Hayes, 2011). In order to understand and implement government policy, it was necessary to apply a form of translation to the policy to enable it to work at a local level (Watson and Michael, 2016).

The language used by recent New Labour governments, led by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown respectively, also contributed to the reinforcing of the erosion of teachers' professional identity, primarily regarding the use of the term 'teacher training' rather than 'teacher education' (Hayes, 2011). According to Austin and Wittgenstein (Austin, 1962 and Wittgenstein, 1963, in Apple, 2013), language has often been used as the key to explaining, controlling, predicting, legitimising and mobilising. It has been argued that education is a broad term to describe an academic discipline, rather than the notion of

skill-based training; moreover, the term 'education' is disappearing as a professional subject, making way for 'education studies'. Notably, under the last New Labour government, the word 'education' was missing from the title of the government department for which it was responsible (Hayes, 2011). Linguistic elements of policy need to be analysed and challenged in order to understand the processes of policy implementation (Watson and Michael (2016). Due to the narrowness of the current standards-driven teacher training model and the rigorous requirements of the National Curriculum, it is necessary that the breadth of teacher education should be addressed; otherwise, trained teachers rather than educated teachers will not be able to deliver education to children in school (Hayes, 2011).

Not only teachers but their educators too have struggled to determine their professional identities in the current climate, while registering concerns as to the dominant perception of professional identity of the future teachers they educate (Pereira et al, 2015; Edmond and Hayler, 2013; Murray, 2014). As educators of future teachers, teacher educators feared that they would be instrumental in colluding with the neo-liberal policy agenda and the attendant commodification of teachers (Werler, 2016). Having announced the creation of the new College of Teaching in England, there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that HE institutions would play a role in professional development (Editorial, 2015).

Presenting systemic changes required by government policy to pupils has been challenging and problematic for some teachers due to the profound emotional bond of empathy they feel for their pupils (Cooper, 2004; Hutchings, 2015). School cultures have become more isolating and distant since the changes and are failing to acknowledge the emotional aspects of teaching. Some teachers fear that the pressures upon them, due to issues such as excessive workload, time constraints and stringent accountability measures, detract from the main focus of their work, which they perceive as their pupils and the need to maintain a good relationship with them as individuals (Hutchings, 2015, pp 54-55). Relationships between teachers and their pupils have therefore been difficult to maintain due to the nature of the policy changes, as noted in the previous chapters on teacher professionalism and professionalization, because teachers have 'an overwhelming desire to support, care for and relate deeply to pupils' (Cooper, 2004, p 12).

Working conditions, time constraints, the rigid curriculum, bureaucracy are all cited as factors contributing towards a reduction in contact time and increased numbers of groups of pupils, resulting in bigger class sizes, which together culminate in making teachers' feel their work is unsatisfactory, breeding frustration, discontent and despair (Zembylas, 2005; Hutchings, 2015). Teachers believe that they have been forced to provide substandard

teaching and learning experiences for their pupils in this climate, contributing to feelings of loss and the erosion of their professional integrity (Hargreaves, 2005; O'Connor, 2008; Hutchings, 2015; Moore and Clarke, 2016).

The dominant discourse, influenced by the neo-liberal agenda, which prevailed in the education forum, became that of accountability, competency and consumerism, stripping the former autonomy of the 1970s and 1980s from the teaching profession and causing stress and concern in teachers' personal and professional lives (Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b; Goepel, 2012; Wilkins, 2011; Mockler, 2012).

A report on the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) (Blatchford et al, 2009; Webster et al, 2011), was published, stating that 'More needs to be done to prepare, particularly classroom based, support staff for their role in schools, especially for the now common, pedagogical, instructional role with pupils'. At the same time, The Cambridge Primary Review (2009), an independent, evidenced-based review of primary education in England, commissioned by Cambridge University, was published, directed by Professor Robin Alexander. This review superseded the 1967 Plowden Report, the last independent review into primary education. The final version of the independent Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander, 2010) urged government to consider a review of staffing in the primary school system as a whole, stating that a complete overhaul was necessary to service the needs of children in today's society rather than remaining entrenched in a nineteenth century system of education. The government did not respond favourably, ignoring Alexander's recommendations. The findings from the DISS report complemented those in the Cambridge Primary Review, adding that 'We suggest that pupils in most need should get more not less of a teacher's time'. Furthermore, they suggested that 'More work on conceptualising the pedagogical role of TAs in their everyday interactions with pupils is required and needs to be built into professional development, school deployment decisions and the management, support and monitoring of support staff' (Blatchford et al, 2009). In spite of evidence to suggest that teachers needed to be valued, consulted and acknowledged, it became a constant source of frustration to them that the government continued to ignore such proposals as these and allowed teachers to remain in a constant state of confusion and dismay.

#### **4.6 The negative impact of emotional investment on teachers' 'sense of self'**

Emotion is an influential factor in the development of a teacher's professional identity, therefore educational reform can have a significant effect on a teacher's professional identity because of their high levels of emotional investment (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2008; Hargreaves, 2005). Positive emotion is what infuses good teaching, as does the

creativity and joy that teachers bring to their lessons. The government reforms, as discussed in previous chapters, have for many teachers extracted the joy and fun from their careers. Teachers are not machines but intuitive and caring people, performing their work with high levels of intuition and care (Hargreaves, 1998). Eisner argues that teachers should not be told how to do their job when they perform 'minor miracles of stunning teaching' (Eisner, in Hargreaves, 1998, p 836), describing their expertise as 'the connoisseurship of teaching'. However, teachers experiencing negative emotions, such as frustration, anger or disappointment, will strive to hide them in order to protect themselves from recriminations from those in power within their institutions, and to maintain an emotionally healthy environment for the children they teach (Zembylas, 2007; Hutchings, 2015). In concealing negative emotions, teachers expose themselves to feelings of worthlessness, powerlessness, inadequacy and shame, which can lead to burnout (Zembylas, 2007).

The commitment that teachers devote to the work they do engenders vulnerability, which occurs as a result of engagement with the emotional aspects of teaching (Kelchtermans, 2009; O'Connor, 2008). Government policy, inspections, regulations and accountability, as discussed in previous chapters, are some of the factors with which teachers have to engage but cannot control (Kelchtermans, 2009; Hutchings, 2015). Teachers often encounter feelings of vulnerability when they make judgements and decisions during the course of a school day, because they are aware that their motives and actions may be challenged (Zembylas, 2005). Yet teachers are constantly striving to make a difference in their pupils' lives, making themselves vulnerable to the consequences of their pupils' results, even though they may never actually see the evidence of their work as a direct set of test results (Kelchtermans, 2009). 'Teachers with a high internal locus of control may experience high job satisfaction when student outcomes are good. On the other hand, when pupils' learning outcomes are poor, they may tend to blame themselves and feel frustrated and inefficacious' (Kelchtermans, 2009, p 266). It has been argued that teachers need to be in control of their own work if they were to achieve a functional and satisfactory balance to their work and life (Bruton, 2013; Evans, 2011). However, teachers continue to cite the lack of control that they experience in their lives, which impacts on their perceived identities, particularly through the introduction of the government documentation on the Remodelling Agenda (Ofsted, 2005) (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010).

As a consequence of their emotional investment, particularly due to excessive workload, the feelings of vulnerability that some teachers experience present a predominant factor that has caused teachers to leave the profession through work-related stress (Illingworth,

2007; NUT, 2011; Jepson and Forrest, 2006). Having discussed government perceptions of the social context in the previous chapter on Professionalism, the impact of a changing social context of teacher identity needs to be noted. Teaching is one of the most stressful occupations in the UK with high levels of sickness absence due to mental health issues (NUT, 2008; Jepson and Forrest, 2006; Illingworth, 2007; Johnson et al 2005; Spielberger, 2010). The challenging emotional issues that teachers face on a regular basis, including fear of violence from pupils or parents, sleepless nights due to worry about work, workplace bullying, coping with the pace of change, professional integrity compromised and excessive workload, have regularly resulted in teachers taking time off work due to stress or depression, an increased reliance on medication, prolonged sickness absence and, ultimately, relinquishing their employment as teachers (Illingworth, 2007; NUT, June 2012).

Teachers are also under pressure as a consequence of the government's austerity measures (Ridge, 2013; Smith 2014). The impact of these measures has shown that children have been suffering as a direct consequence of the recession and subsequent austerity measures, resulting in child poverty and hunger, and causing major concerns about their wellbeing (Preston, 2008; Ridge, 2013). Dealing with issues such as this is the lived reality for many teachers. The incidences of negative impact on the emotional health and wellbeing of children has been documented by the World Health Organisation and ChildLine (in Hutchings, 2015, p55), stating that more children are experiencing feelings of stress and anxiety due to education-related problems, such as testing, resulting in higher incidences of counselling amongst children. The impact of child poverty on teachers means that they increase their emotional investment and a vicious circle emerges.

Teachers who are suffering from stress-related illnesses worry that their head teacher and/or governing body might use this knowledge to influence selection criteria in determining candidates for redundancy, as, even if a teacher is absent through long-term sickness, a head teacher can still bring disciplinary procedures against that member of staff if they believe that they are under-performing (Hebson et al, 2007). The threat of capability procedures, together with other stress-inducing factors, make high level performativity difficult for teachers to achieve; all contributing to the stresses and pressures of the job of teaching (Hebson et al, 2007; Illingworth, 2007). Acknowledging the stressful nature of teaching, it has been argued that the key to stress reduction may be identified through studying the connection between neuro-cognition and education, taking into account teachers' attitudes, understanding and application, with regard to their work (Sneyers et al, 2016). However, like other interpretations of the negative impact of



change in the profession such recommendations tend to be shunned in a sector where neo-liberal discourse prevails.

The coalition government had engaged in a discourse which cited teaching as a 'craft', explaining that 'watching others, and being rigorously observed yourself as you develop, is the best route to acquiring mastery in the classroom' (Gove, 2010 in Edmond and Hayler, 2013, p 211). In practice, the quality of teachers became linked to the new, more exacting standards-driven accountability measures, which involved the acquisition of skills and the continual assessment of competency (Mockler, 2013; Everington, 2016; Bourke et al, 2015; Hult, 2016). The increase in assessed performativity gave rise to teachers' shifting perceptions of their own identity, which was particularly significant in early career teachers who had experienced assessed performativity as pupils themselves (Wilkins, 2011). Such teachers faced a dilemma, being conflicted as to 'the demands of accountability and the desire for autonomy', as well as holding aspirations of career ambitions (Wilkins, 2011). Tensions had already existed not only for teachers, but also for teacher educators, who had begun to feel undermined by the neo-liberal policy agendas and the resulting shift in the nature of the teaching profession (Hall and Schultz, 2003).

## **Conclusions**

In an attempt to provide a broad definition of teacher identity, I have drawn upon the work of Kim (2013) who purports to offer the hallmarks of passion, dedication and commitment to children and teaching by way of defining teacher identity. I have also drawn upon the work of Day (2002) who cites motivation, efficacy, commitment, job satisfaction and effectiveness as factors which are central to the concept of teacher identity.

It is important that teachers have agency to satisfy their professional needs and fulfil their passion to teach. The emotional factors incorporated within a teacher's professional identity must be addressed, as well as the cognitive factors, particularly when reforms take place. Teachers experience strong emotions surrounding their professional identity and surrounding the professional relationships they have with the children they teach. Emotional investment in the learning outcomes of their pupils means that they feel vulnerable when their work as teachers is challenged, challenges which can be directed from inside their own school or from their community, threatening professional factors such as respect and trust. Ofsted inspections, as previously mentioned for example, can invoke strong negative emotions, resulting in threats to teachers' mental health and wellbeing due to stress, anxiety, fear, guilt and shame, described as 'dehumanisation'

and 'deprofessionalisation' (Day et al, 2006, p 612). Teachers endeavour to do their job whilst having to navigate and negotiate a number of different roles on a daily basis in the midst of constant struggle between structure, commitment and agency.

Although teacher identities can be at once stable or fragmented, depending on the different circumstances they are experiencing at any one time during their careers, the more changes that occur that are not in the teachers' control will result in greater incidents of fragmentation. It has been argued that teachers are currently motivated by fear and have no autonomy, due to the emergence of hard-line standards and accountability which has continued to undermine the confidence and status of the teaching profession. Political decision making has had a negative effect on the status of teachers, presenting the government's definition of 'good' teachers as those who can pass government tests, rather than by taking into account what they perceive as less quantifiable traits.

Teachers make a choice to demonstrate caring behaviour in order to preserve a sense of professional identity and because teachers believe that a significant aspect of their work is to inspire and motivate their pupils. Although social and cultural factors influence the definition of the teacher's role, and a teacher's professional identity may be established through the emotional and reflexive nature of the individual, teachers invest a sense of themselves in their work, maintaining a strong commitment to their profession, resulting in a fusion between personal identity as a teacher and their role as a teacher. However, the cost of caring is a high price to pay, yet, paradoxically, it is the resistance of teachers to the current reforms that drives them, because teachers find it difficult to practice agency in a climate of 'technical rationalist assumptions' (O'Connor, 2008, p 119). The climate of regulation, redefinition and rationalism is at odds with the type of teacher they want to be. Teachers are finding themselves in dilemmas due to the ethical and emotional nature of their work which is constantly negated by policy makers, and this is played out against a backdrop of the notion of competencies; a very hard-edged notion which is alien to the caring, emotionally investing teachers who want to give their pupils the best education they know they can deliver.

Reductionist discourses had redefined and weakened the nature of teacher professionalism, presenting a confusing image of teacher identity. From confident, respected professionals, their autonomy shifted to promote a new technician status, dependent upon performativity, data and standards to acknowledge self-worth. The government's reductionist discourses, which will be discussed further in the next chapter on Activism, were challenged by both the NUT and teacher educators in an attempt to salvage what was left of teachers' professional identity.

The next chapter reviews factors concerning activism and related concepts, exploring the phenomenon of global resistance and the concepts of collective resistance, power, agency and resilience in the context of my research questions. Although teachers are in a strong position being on the frontline of teaching in the classroom on a daily basis, the oppressive nature of the government education reform agenda has removed this advantage through their neo-liberal attitudes and behaviour. The professionalisation of support staff is one significant aspect which has become an increasing threat to teachers' work and it is the threat of de-professionalisation that causes teachers to become involved in acts of resistance. The power of solidarity against the neo-liberal education agenda has provided a strong stance which is empowering to teachers locally and globally.

## **Chapter 5 – Activism: responding to radical government reforms through resistance and collective action**

### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews factors concerning activism and related concepts. I explore the phenomenon of global resistance and the concepts of collective resistance, power, agency and resilience in the context of my research questions. Teachers are on the front line of education in the classroom which is an important and influential position, yet in this position, they are also likely to be criticised or attacked. Although teachers are in such a strong position, being on the frontline of teaching in the classroom on a daily basis, the oppressive nature of the government education reform agenda has undermined their influence through their neo-liberal attitudes and behaviour. The power of solidarity against the neo-liberal education agenda has provided a strong platform which is empowering to teachers locally and globally. I have drawn upon the work of Picower (2012), having explored a wide range of literature and possibilities, to define teacher activism, the journey of which this chapter charts.

In order to differentiate between terms and provide conceptual clarity, I use the term 'non-compliance' to signify a refusal to comply with or obey specific education policy requirements. The term 'resistance' is used to show opposition of force to force, as noted in the act of resisting oppression. I use the term 'activism' to denote a policy or action involving the use of vigorous campaigning, including strike action, to bring about political or social change. These terms are used throughout this chapter, particularly in 5.3 which discusses global resistance to the neo-liberal education agenda.

Previous chapters have explored notions of teacher professionalism, the process of professionalization and how teachers' identity is shaped by these and other factors. These chapters have shown that external evaluations and government accountability have had a negative impact upon teachers' perceptions of their own professionalism (Hult, 2016). The work and conceptions of professionalism of teachers has been changed in recent years due to government initiatives and policies, though teachers have continued to contain some of their own insights and views on professionalism (Swann et al, 2010). The introduction of the professionalization of support staff in schools has had a detrimental effect upon teachers' work and their sense of professionalism. However, the division of labour was blurred due to the lack of demarcation between roles. The government reforms had potential to foster positive outcomes and enhance teaching and learning, but due to

the absence of agreed intentions between the government and teachers, there was no opportunity for teachers to show their professional competence. Reductionist discourses had redefined and weakened the nature of teacher professionalism, presenting a confusing image of teacher identity. From confident, respected professionals, their autonomy shifted to promote a new technician status, dependent upon performativity, data and standards to acknowledge self-worth. The government's reductionist discourses were challenged by both the NUT and teacher educators in an attempt to salvage what was left of teachers' professional identity. It is through these challenges that teachers have become more activist in their approach to the government's neo-liberal education agenda.

### **5.1 Radical government reforms, the international dimension and the emergence of teacher resistance**

In May 2010, the new Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition government came into power, initiating a catalogue of changes to education. The new Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove (2010-2014), began by stating his intentions to stop the widening gap of children's progress between the social classes, as reported in The Telegraph by Graeme Paton, Education Editor, stating that, 'In effect, rich thick kids do better than poor clever children when they arrive at school [and] the situation as they go through gets worse...That's why we need early intervention. It is also why we need the radical school reforms that we have brought forward' (Paton, 2010). This statement was received as an indication that the new government was demonstrating greater awareness of the inequalities in the education system and revealing plans to influence social mobility; a departure from past priorities.

The government cited the continuing poor levels of education in England as compared to other countries which appeared to be more successful in the PISA and OECD tables, stating that they would 'toughen up exams, overhaul the national curriculum, reform teacher training and give staff more power to discipline pupils ... all schools will be forced to meet tough new targets or face being taken over' (Paton, 2010). However, teachers and teacher trade unions were concerned about the impact of the pace at which the reforms were being presented. Tim Oates, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development at the Cambridge Assessment Examination Board, raised concerns that schools had already been 'overloaded by curriculum reforms in recent years' (Paton, 2010). John Bangs, speaking on behalf of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), purported that many of the new documents facilitated a 'teaching by numbers' approach (in Parker, 2015, p460). Teacher trade unions attempted to engage the

government in positive dialogue to counter the negative stance, yet the prospect of such engagement was ignored.

The new government began the reforms by making significant changes through a new White Paper (DfE, 2010). There was criticism of the former government, stating that it had 'marginalised teachers and created a toxic target culture that forced pupils into taking simple subjects of little value to employers' (Paton, 2010). However, the government's methods of change were not received favourably as they did not uphold the promise of rescue as initially indicated (Mockler, 2012; Everington, 2016; Bourke et al, 2015; Parker, 2015; Hult, 2016). In fact, the government was criticised for consistently imposing short time frames for consultation on these changes, one such example being the programme of study proposals which were sent to subject associations for comment with only a three-day window for response (Alexander, 2010). However, in spite of the rapidity of the changes to policy, noted as 'a rush of major changes' by the NUT (Parker, 2015, p461), some teachers tried to be compliant in their acceptance for fear of government reprisal (Jones, 2007).

In initiating reforms, the new government argued in favour of the implementation of new methods of recruiting and training teachers. Bringing former forces personnel into the classroom, the government believed, would facilitate improvement in the standards of behaviour. This initiative was an incentive for ex-service personnel without a degree to gain a degree and QTS in two years. The intention was to incorporate mentoring and role models, largely male, but this initiative was also viewed by teachers and teacher trade unions as an insult to those teachers who had already integrated these roles into their daily work. Chris Keates, General Secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters and the Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), responded to the proposed programme, stating that 'To say you can simply transfer the skills from one to the other is an oversimplification of the complexities of dealing with pupil behaviour in schools' (BBC, 2013). The government declared that, in the wake of the 'Teach First' programme, which fast-tracked graduates to teach in schools, a new programme called 'Teach Next' would be established to enable anyone from outside the teaching profession to bring their unrelated work expertise into the classroom. Teaching schools, modelled on the lines of teaching hospitals, would also be set up to allow teachers to be trained 'on the job' (Paton, 2010).

Referring to teachers, teacher educators, and the education workforce collectively as 'The Blob' (The Guardian, 2013), Gove suggested that teachers were incompetent, therefore

senior leadership teams were to be given power to dismiss teachers they deemed as underperforming. Not only was this form of language and the sentiment behind it insulting, it was blatantly and unashamedly confrontational. By training new people to teach using his prescribed methods, Gove stated that standards would be raised. However, the Teach First initiative enrolled 186 graduates at its outset in 2003 giving rise to concern that teachers trained via this route would not be given the appropriate, rigorous theoretical underpinning afforded to trainees on conventional training courses (Blandford, 2008). The scheme - which focused upon high-achieving graduates with leadership potential, who would not have otherwise chosen to teach, being placed in challenging schools – enabled these teachers' careers to progress, ultimately working in leadership positions in business as well as education (Rice et al, 2015). Despite having worked as teachers, they did not, as had been anticipated, advocate changes to policy and practice to allow the plight of disadvantaged pupils to improve. It appears that those who survived in schools had been attracted to the leadership aspects of the job rather than the desire to engage with the issues of pupil disadvantage and the achievement gap (Blandford, 2008; Rice et al, 2015). Instead of showing an appreciation for the work of existing teachers and having purported to acknowledge their contribution to the education of pupils, as witnessed in the previous government's 'Raising standards and tackling workload: a national agreement' (DfES, 2003) document, the new government failed to do so.

In the media, the government referred to the ever-present success that had been afforded to Finland and the Finnish education system and the intention to emulate it. 'This white paper shamelessly plunders the best ideas from the highest performing education nations and applies them to our own circumstances' (Gove in Vasagar, 2010). However, instead of modelling the new reforms on this successful system, the government was unsupportive of existing teachers, using adversarial language to show its intention to introduce tougher methods rather than supporting an already struggling workforce (Sahlberg, 2012; Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). cursory comparison of the two systems indicated the government's intentions for tougher exams rather than scrapping testing; tougher targets for schools to meet, resulting in forced takeovers, rather than trusting the judgements of teachers; tougher rigor for what was described as 'underperforming teachers' rather than support; and tougher discipline, including the introduction of former military personnel to enforce discipline rather than motivating pupils by teaching interesting and engaging lessons. Teacher training, therefore, was transforming into an arena of confrontation and surveillance as opposed to the Finnish model of raising the esteem of the profession and enabling teachers to feel valued.

In 2011, the document 'Training our next generation of outstanding teachers: implementation plan' (DfE 2011b), following the introduction of 'Training our next generation of outstanding teachers' (DfE 2011c), was introduced by the government to improve the training of teachers. In its opening statement, the document presented the reasons for the introduction of this implementation plan, building on the contents of the White Paper (DfE, 2010), as 'recruiting the very best graduates into teaching, securing better value from the public investment in ITT, and reforming training so that more ITT is led by schools' (DfE 2011b, p 3). In response to this document, a Select Committee Inquiry was conducted by the House of Commons Education Committee (House of Commons, 2012), to which members of various interested organisations were invited to participate and contribute their views and opinions, including the NUT, resulting in the document, 'Great teachers: attracting, training and recruiting the best' (House of Commons, 2012). In response to the committee's questions regarding attracting the most suitable trainees into teaching, the NUT stated that 'a good teacher needs a range of qualities ... Good interpersonal skills and an ability to bring out the best in every pupil are critical alongside good pedagogical and subject knowledge' (House of Commons, 2012, p 184, Ev 178). The NUT welcomed the recognition by government that teachers needed such skills as 'perseverance, resilience and motivation', yet challenged the government regarding the requirement for a first class degree in order to be among the best teachers, as such a personal achievement was not necessarily a pre-requisite in the making of an outstanding teacher. They suggested that the government would be more effective in recruiting high achieving students by allowing teachers 'greater autonomy over their classrooms and working conditions. In addition pay and conditions in teaching should be commensurate to equivalent professions' (House of Commons, 2012, p 184, Ev 178).

In response to the different training routes proposed by the government, the NUT explained that, although it was important to involve schools in the training of teachers, Higher Education (HE) providers should not be under-estimated, as these providers allowed students to examine the theory that underpins teaching, allowing for effective pedagogical subject knowledge and fostering a greater depth of understanding. Both the elements of theory and practice were important to the training of teachers, yet responsibility for each one needed to be established. Traditionally, the role of HE in the training of teachers had been significant not only in promoting professional values and ideologies, and providing opportunities for the development of professional identity; HE institutions had also validated the professional warrant which formally awarded a recommendation for QTS (Edmond and Hayler, 2013). The NUT warned that the needs of the student teacher may not be prioritised in school settings, particularly considering the



involvement in ITT of large academy chains against the backdrop of their own needs (House of Commons, 2012, p 186, Ev 180).

Although the earlier document 'Raising standards and tackling workload: a national agreement' (DfES, 2003) had been presented as a national agreement, the NUT had cited misgivings and refused to sign it. The NUT feared that qualified teachers were in danger of having their work taken from them, having noted that cover was expected to be provided not only by supply teachers, but increasingly by cover supervisors and HLTAs (DfES, 2003, p7), which would result in the lowering of professional standards and bringing the accountability of children's test results into question (Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010; Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). The document also implied that teachers who were already employed at a school would be compelled to increase their workload to cover the teaching of colleagues by using their protected planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time. Work was expected to be planned by the class teacher for unqualified staff, such as HLTAs and cover supervisors, to deliver (p7, p9), exacerbating workload for teachers instead of easing the burden.

An emotional burden which has been placed upon the shoulders of teachers in recent times has been the expectation that they act as role models for the children they teach (Goldman, 1996; Greer, 2011). Parents have been judged to be lacking in the ways in which they prepare their children for socialisation and teachers have been increasingly expected to become role models for their pupils in dealing with emotions (Goldman, 1996; Hargreaves, 1998), not only with regards to the content of lessons, but also in so far as the way in which the lessons are taught. The responsibility on teachers to model appropriate emotional competence has become an issue, particularly when teaching emotionally-fuelled aspects of the curriculum such as social justice, when attitudes, practices and convictions may be discussed and contested (Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b). Having the confidence and ability to model emotional competence is not something that can be easily taught, as it is seen to be part of a person's personality or character (Goldman, 1996). Further pressure can occur when teachers are not able to demonstrate emotional intelligence.

Early career teachers often have difficulties in demonstrating emotional competence due to a lack of confidence in displaying such a deep-rooted element of their own personality so soon, fearing exposure and vulnerability (Zembylas, 2003a; Nias, 1996). This is an aspect of agency which they are able to develop as their careers progress and they observe and model emotional issues being dealt with by more experienced teachers

(Goldman, 1996; Nias, 1996; MacLure, 1993). Good modelling by teachers could be shared with parents and others throughout the school community, although this could add further pressure to teachers who already feel scrutinised by internal and external mechanisms (Zembylas, 2007).

Teachers were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with what was happening to themselves and to their profession. The government reforms, such as those which led to the emergence of blurred lines of the division of labour between teachers, TAs and HLTAs, meant that teachers found their work highly stressful (Graves, 2013; Stevenson, 2007). The rapid changes that occurred in the nature of a teacher's normal working day caused some teachers to feel unprotected by their unions because many teacher unions, with the exception of the NUT who did not sign the National Agreement, actively supported the Remodelling Agenda (Ofsted, 2005) by engaging with local and national government agencies (Stevenson, 2007). Teachers individually began to resist the de-professionalisation of teaching, often displaying non-compliant behaviour, such as refusing to formally record SATs results. Yet engaging in non-compliant activity in isolation, teachers found this form of resisting the government reforms increasingly difficult. The radical reforms of the new coalition government, together with its confrontational stance finally provided the impetus for establishing roots of collective action.

## **5.2 Teacher Activism**

Concerns have been expressed that teacher professionalism is under threat due to the impact of external evaluations and government accountability which have had a negative impact upon teachers' perceptions of their own professionalism (Hult, 2016). These concerns have been discussed in previous chapters, demonstrating the need for teachers to establish collective action against the government's neo-liberal agenda and radical reforms. As a consequence, it has been argued that it is necessary to focus upon the status of teaching in order to re-establish a forum for teachers' professional judgement (Biesta, 2015). Professional values do not appear to be acknowledged by government attitudes and behaviours as manifest in the primacy given to accountability, competence and standards in the neo-liberal discourse. While teachers try to work with the new governmental and institutional structures which challenge their fundamental notions of professionalism, the perceived threat of de-professionalisation of their work may be met or has been met by resistance and subsequent activism (Swann et al, 2010; Hult, 2016; Tichenor and Tichenor, 2005; Clarke, 2013).

The neo-liberal ideology and discourses in education which drive government policy perpetuate a discourse of 'unquestionable truths' and 'officially sanctioned ways of thinking' in institutional settings (Turunen and Rafferty, 2013). Wood (2014) goes as far as to suggest that 'data-led surveillance' has become the means by which teachers are measured and controlled. Whilst dominant neo-liberal discourses may seek to gain teachers' support through a focus on the essential purpose of teaching, the discourse effectively obscures alternative perspectives and creates barriers to critique (Turunen and Rafferty, 2013). Clarke (2013) challenges these reductionist discourses by focusing on the work of Ball (2003 in Clarke, 2013), who advocates resistance against the 'terror of performativity'. Ball is effectively saying that the 'terror of performativity' has been disguised as enjoyment and must be resisted. However, Ball's views relate not only to teacher activism but to the landscape of education as a whole.

Personal struggles contribute towards teachers becoming advocates for resistance. Such teachers may display acts of resistance on a personal level through, for example, non-compliance, yet experiences of this kind have influenced teachers from as far back as their own schooling, often prompting them to become activists for social justice (Collay, 2010; Burke and Adler, 2013). Collaboration and mutual support are the key factors necessary for activism to take place; transformational change to the reductionist discourse of reform being the goal. Collective agency is the differentiating factor between resistance and activism as, although individuals can resist, involvement in groups lead to engagement in activism. Teachers' social capital suggests a 'strong foundation' to develop as a strong activist force, having the ability to organise as well as strategic positioning (Sachs, 2003; Hill, 2001). Collective action through trade unionism should empower agency in challenging the neo-liberal government policy agenda and education reforms. However, evidence suggests that teachers remain alienated and vulnerable to the normalisation of governmental power which they individually accept (Sachs, 2003; Zembylas, 2003a; Hill, 2001).

Social activism initiatives are cited as ways to preserve professional identity (Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010), whilst the instigation of social justice groups is also suggested as a means to resist the governmental neo-liberal agenda (Picower, 2012). One way that teachers can 'resist' is by identifying 'nomadic spaces' to build 'new opportunities for professionalism' and subvert the 'narratives of the state' (Wood, 2014). Systematic critical reflection enables teachers to maintain a sense of professional identity, advocating social justice for the pupils they teach as well as supporting other teachers (Collay, 2010). CPD opportunities, led primarily by teachers, are also cited as a means of activism and a means of generating opportunities for educational debate (Wood, 2014). However, as

discussed in the chapter on Identity, opportunities for reflective practice are limited, thus limiting opportunities for resistance in this way. Yet in limiting opportunities for reflective practice, the landscape is shifting from one of resistance to activism. Political resistance leading to activism is recognised as an act of caring in a landscape of increased accountability and marginalisation (Burke and Adler, 2013).

Ultimately, the language of reform in 'reductionist discourses' has been instrumental in prompting activism. In the process of actively changing institutional discourses, the de-construction of dominant reductionist discourses, followed by the re-construction of new discourses, are instrumental in contributing towards transformational change (Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). Criticism and disruption by teacher activists are constructive, allowing for agency, when transformational change is applied (Sannino, 2010). Such disruption may be witnessed through marches, strike action or picket lines demarcating a barrier to show that teachers will comply with government policy so far and no further. Teacher activism can be defined as the 'commitments and practices' of teachers who 'help support other teachers', working 'collectively against oppression' (Picower, 2012). Examples of support may be noted not only locally or nationally, but also through encouragement and messages of solidarity from one union to another internationally.

### **5.3 Global resistance to the neo-liberal agenda**

The neo-liberal practices of education and reductionist discourses which dominate current debates have seized control of the teaching profession, instigating resistance and subsequent activism from teacher unions worldwide (Wood, 2014; Apple, 2013; Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Mausethagen and Granlund, 2012; Poole, 2007; Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010). In order to contextualise resistance to and activism against the Global Education Reform Movement, coined by Sahlberg as the GERM (Sahlberg, 2012), I present examples of non-compliance, resistance and activism regarding the neo-liberal agenda in countries which are undergoing similar radical transformations. Since the onset of the neo-liberal reforms, teachers across the world have been involved in acts of resistance through trade union activism. The GERM has been responsible for spreading reductionist discourses, resulting in the marketisation of education globally. An example of this may be noted by the number of test papers each pupil needs in order to pass each of the standardised tests. The cost of each test paper, multiplied by the number of pupils who will be given them, indicates the high, overall cost. In this instance, teachers believe that their professionalism is being compromised in favour of governmental financial gain. In order to preserve the notion of teacher professionalism, organised teacher trade union groups around the world have been

instrumental in effective activism (Apple, 2013; Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Poole, 2007; Mausethagen and Granlund, 2012).

Non-compliance has been proven to be effective in actively resisting government reforms. The Union of Education Norway (UEN) argues that government intervention through neo-liberal reforms has caused teachers to re-define and re-construct their personal identities as teachers, and the notion of teacher professionalism as a whole (Mausethagen and Granlund, 2012). The new constructions of these discourses in Norway occur through both government and UEN, albeit from opposing stances, though both claim to have the best interests for high quality education at heart (Mausethagen and Granlund, 2012). Both government and UEN cite research-based practice as a predominant factor in the renewal and reform process, yet each define this factor differently. The government's notion of research-based practice is one which is dominated by state control, stating what teachers should research, whereas teachers want the freedom to engage with research that they themselves have chosen. Teacher accountability and specialisation are other areas of contention. The struggle continues, citing stronger trade union activism as the key to resisting compliance with the policies of accountability, the lengthening of teacher education programmes and the re-defining of research-based practice as a form of activism (Mausethagen and Granlund, 2012). Teachers in Norway are endeavouring to re-define and re-construct their professionalism, yet they are unable to do this successfully through research-based practice due to there being two definitions, one which is teacher-defined and the other which is government-defined. Teacher activist research can be used successfully, enabling changes through resistance and self-transformation, to inform new practices and to open new possibilities to teachers who feel trapped in the neo-liberal cycle which has been working from deficit models (Zembylas, 2003b; Simon and Campano, 2013). In blurring the definitions of research-based practice in Norway, it would appear that the government is deliberately in conflict with teachers for fear that these practices will become a form of activism.

In Canada, as in Norway and England, the conflict between government and trade unions continues (Poole, 2007; Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Apple, 2013). The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) acknowledge that although educational reform in Canada has not been as aggressive as has been the case in England, there is still evidence of the neo-liberal agenda working through education (Osmond-Johnson, 2015). Switching the traditional trade union focus from workers and their conditions, ATA concentrates its energies on the issues of teacher professionalism and the ways in which the union can enable resistance, sometimes through non-compliance, to the neo-liberal policy agenda which would reduce the nature of teacher professionalism to a 'paint by numbers' exercise (Osmond-Johnson,

2015, p 19). In support of the teachers' situation in England, ATA suggest that teachers are in an advantaged position, being on the 'frontline' and therefore should be able to express their views to government on how education can be executed to enable maximum benefit to teaching and learning. However, teachers in Canada are not treated as active participants in their own profession in the policy arena, in spite of their desire to promote sustainable educational change with genuine interest (Osmond-Johnson, 2015).

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) have been in conflict with their provincial governing body since a neo-liberal agenda for educational reform was revealed in 2001 (Poole, 2007). This stance is similar to the conflict between teachers and the highly contested neo-liberal reforms in England. Poole (2007) describes the nature of neo-liberalism in terms of 'the government's faith in marketisation' as the only source of benefit to education and the wider society, whereas BCTF are more concerned about the vision and purpose of education, including the erosion of teacher professionalism. Whilst the government agenda promotes greater efficiency and prosperity, BCTF contests the power relations between teachers and government to counter the political ideology of neo-liberalism through non-compliance and other forms of resistance, to uphold the professionalism of teachers (Poole, 2007).

Teachers in Germany continue to be active in resisting the neo-liberal education reforms by rejecting the regime of tests through non-compliance (Terhart, 2013). Quality assurance and standards-based accountability have been difficult to assess in the wake of teacher resistance, as many teachers have not adhered to the expected government norms of data-driven development by ignoring, misinterpreting or misusing feedback (Terhart, 2013). Teachers in Germany have continued to assert their professionalism by using internal evaluation to inform their teaching. This is a strong stance of unity and resistance which is empowering to teachers globally.

In the USA, research-based practice is promoted as a means of resistance against the neo-liberal education agenda and the preservation of teacher professionalism (Simon and Campano, 2013). Through alternative practices, asserting the relationship between knowledge and teaching, teachers are on the frontline of the profession on a daily basis (Simon and Campano, 2013; Osmond-Johnson, 2015). This frontline position, which is acknowledged in Canada but not actuated, is a useful vantage point in order to obtain authentic research which in turn can enable social identity and agency, the results of which can engender activism (Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b, 2005).

Teachers in the USA from different teachers' unions are standing together to resist the threat of the dismantling of trade unions in order to engage in what has become known as

social action, to resist the neo-liberal school reforms (Horn, 2014). The same threat of the dismantling of trade unions is also looming in England, causing teachers to fear for their means of advocacy in affecting change through trade union action. Having seen the negative effects of the neo-liberal agenda upon all school staff, particularly attacking educators and their autonomy at all levels, a new way of resistance through 'social movement unionism' has emerged in the USA (Weiner, 2012 in Apple, 2013, p 926). In raising awareness in the public sphere and forming alliances with community groups, such as those cited through BCTF and the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU), a new kind of unionism may be founded, restoring collective memories and working towards committed action (Apple, 2013). Broader alliances and resulting transformational changes are cited as necessary to resist the neo-liberal agenda (Apple, 2013).

In spite of claims that professional unity has been the aim of teachers in Sweden for several decades, 'social movement unionism' appears to be inaccessible (Lilja, 2014). Although professional unity would make for a stronger line of resistance (Apple, 2013) and teachers in Sweden have agreed that a firm knowledge base to enable research-based practices would be a useful strategy of professionalism against the recent neo-liberal reforms, teacher unions cannot agree upon how this would be enacted (Lilja, 2014). The intra-professional struggles between teacher trade unions have detracted from the main issues concerning education policy debates, silencing what might otherwise be a strong voice of resistance. Fundamental historical differences in identity are cited as barriers against professional unity (Lilja, 2014).

Social media activism is becoming an effective form of activism globally. The use of public support campaigns, such as evidenced in USA, and social media to support teachers against neo-liberal reforms are being used productively. In Israel, teachers took direct action against educational reforms by taking strike action in 2007 for 64 days against the 'New Horizon' educational reform (Berkovich, 2011). The strike was supported by the public through the introduction of web-based campaigns, using both emotional and rational appeals, and presenting teachers as the most professional, influential and knowledgeable people within the educational arena (Berkovich, 2011). The media, primarily the internet, was a highly significant instrument in providing public support for the teachers in Israel.

In spite of the growing phenomenon of social media activism, it can be perceived as a double-edged sword. Media attention in Australia, by contrast to Israel, reveals a negative effect on teachers and their professionalism. Deficit discourses about teachers are constructed through the media to denigrate teachers and teaching (Berkovich, 2011;

Thomas, 2011). The Australian government's neo-liberal educational policy context, together with the media, primarily television, conspires to present a derogatory image of teachers, exemplified through situation comedy. It is necessary, therefore, for teachers to challenge these deficit discourses in order to allow for a balanced public debate to enable re-constructions of teacher professionalism (Thomas, 2011). Teachers in Australia have a difficult situation given how the government uses media. It is not so much that social media activism is failing but it is ineffective when countering a media onslaught which promotes the discourse of neo-liberalism.

Global solidarity appears to be the most effective means of resistance in the light of neo-liberal education reforms. The USA teachers present a successful outcome due to their united front against the dismantling of trade unions, while teachers in Israel and Germany offer strong examples of positive outcomes when resistance is used to preserve professionalism. Research-based practice as a form of resistance appears to be favoured by most countries affected by the GERM to allow teachers to re-construct and re-define teacher professionalism. However, teachers in Norway appear to be confounded by rival definitions of research-based practice and teachers in Sweden cannot achieve a consensus as to how to set it in place for maximum effect against the GERM. Australian teachers appear to be demonised as a profession through the media, which is reminiscent of allegations made by teachers in England. However, through casting their sights globally, teachers in England may learn from, and also enable, others from around the world to resist the GERM where it is demoralising the teaching profession.

#### **5.4 Teacher resilience**

In order to combat the adverse aspects of teaching, resilience is critical to the management and sustainability necessary to survive, particularly on a 'personal, relational and organisational' level. Teacher resilience is situated within a neo-liberal globalised economic spectrum (Gu and Day, 2013, 2007; Price et al, 2012). Resilience is characterised as an emotional practice having four dimensions, namely profession-related, emotional, motivational and social (Mansfield, et al, 2012). Resilience, as an emotional practice, therefore equates to a teacher's identity which has been discussed in the previous chapter. A constructed concept, resilience is important to teachers' work in that some teachers are able to survive in spite of extremely difficult circumstances (Gu and Day, 2013). However, there is a relationship between resilience and autonomy, as teachers may be able to withstand pressures up to a point, but unless they are able to take control of their identity and their work, they will be defeated (Price et al, 2012). It is



important that teachers use their resilience to take control by performing acts of resistance, non-compliance and direct action against the neo-liberal education reforms.

For early career teachers, resilience is multi-dimensional, developing as their careers progress, and linking it to teacher retention or attrition (Mansfield et al, 2012; Doney, 2013). In order to build resilience in early career teachers, factors that initiate stress should be afforded counter-balance to establish protective factors in their everyday lives. Coping strategies, such as humour and religious or spiritual beliefs, can alleviate some of the stress and may go as far as to foster retention (Doney, 2013; Moore, 2013). As emotional exhaustion and burnout are factors facing all teachers under stress, early career teachers need to be able to overcome the negative factors linked to teaching, and build resilience (Moore, 2013). Having cited pupil behaviour, excessive workload and long working hours as the most significant causes of stress, Moore (2013) suggests delivering resilience training to ensure that early career teachers survive and overcome the stresses indicative of the profession, in order to promote wellbeing, career longevity and to enjoy the work of teaching. However, some teachers would argue that this would exacerbate the current situation as it is not resilience training that is needed but tackling the root causes of the problems in education brought about by government reforms.

There remains a dilemma between dealing with the fundamental problems which have given rise to teacher stress and building resilience as a short term solution to the immanent problem. The issue is complex. Building resilience to survive in an environment which is emotionally charged and where teachers feel powerless is important. However, developing the structures that can enhance collective agency to regain the control is necessary to preserve professional identity. Peer collaboration or mentoring can be a positive step towards fostering resilience (Pearce and Morrison, 2011; Morrison, 2013; Uitto et al, 2015; Moore, 2013). Participation in trade unionism enables teachers to build resilience, particularly women teachers who feel marginalised in their workplace.

### **5.5 Women teachers and collective action: power and resistance**

In exploring the motives for trade union participation, workers generally may be divided into categories depending upon the sort of action they are liable to take, these being mild, moderate or militant actions (Klandermans, 1986). Many trade union members initially join for insurance purposes, in the event of them needing legal representation against allegations by an employer (Klandermans, 1986). Some workers may be divided into categories of trade union participation, these being administrative participation, such as working on a committee, indirect administrative participation, such as voting, direct participation in decision making, such as strikes, and personal participation, such as

taking part in negotiations (Hockner and Goll in Klandermans, 1986). It is therefore not surprising that not every trade union member will take strike action when called upon by their trade union to do so, yet strike action is central to trade union activism with regards to political equality (Bogg, 2009, p102).

In spite of acknowledging the motives for trade union participation, there are other factors which influence the participation of women teachers. Women teachers have constituted the majority of the teaching profession since the latter part of the nineteenth century (Gilroy, 1999), yet in the absence of agency and control in the workplace, some women teachers have looked to the collective resistance of trade unionism. However, women's status in trade unionism has not been easily secured. Women's trade union membership and participation is low due to the patriarchal culture which mirrors that of the workplace (Sinclair, 1993; Holloway in Davis, 2011; Kirton and Healy, 1999, p36). Indeed, many women are prompted to join a trade union because of experience at a significant gendered or collective event (Kirton and Healy, 1999) such as a women's only section meeting of their trade union. This critical step evidences the need for women to feel comfortable amongst their own gender, where they may feel an element of solidarity, despite finding themselves within the traditional patriarchal trade union culture.

While the influence of patriarchal culture is acknowledged, it has been argued that women's positioning regarding the concept of power is problematic. Despite claims that women teachers may find solidarity and support through their trade union work, the concept of women and power is contested by Allen (2009, 1998) who argues that women have not gone far enough in either defining or developing a satisfactory stance regarding power. In exploring the notions of 'power over' and 'power to' (Parsons in Waters, 1994, p236), she argues that 'power with' is the element missing from feminist theory. In order to achieve solidarity, women need 'solidarity and coalition building' (Allen, 2009, p7) to be able to understand notions of power before resistance can be facilitated.

Early examples of women's resistance in the trade union movement, which may be seen as a challenge to received wisdom regarding women and power, can be found from as far back as 1888, when women workers instigated the London match girls' strike, exposing the dangerous working conditions, long hours and low pay experienced by the women and girls working in the Bryant and May factory (Raw in Davis, 2011). The women chain makers of Cradley Heath in England took strike action in 1910 in response to their unreasonably low wages. In the USA, Mary Harris Jones, known as Mother Jones, worked to enable miners and their families to stand up to the owners of the mines due to their unacceptable working conditions. In 1902, she was deemed to be 'the most dangerous

woman in America' as a result of this successful campaign (Collins, 2003). In the 1960s and 1970s particularly, strike action for equal pay demands became a prominent focus due to the entry of women into the workplace of production, such as the Ford sewing machinists' strike in 1968 (Beechey, 1987) which led to the Equal Pay Act (1970) two years later.

Teachers perceive the government as having power which impacts upon them negatively, eroding their professional status and imposing overly strict accountability measures (Biesta, 2015), surveillance, self-surveillance and social control (Bourke, 2015). Power may be exerted through the imposition of constrained circumstances upon the individual which, in turn, can cause individuals to behave in a manner contrary to their own interests (Waters, 1994). Some teachers, particularly early career teachers, welcome the imposition of constrained circumstances in the form of the professional standards in assessment because it sets parameters for them at a stage when they cannot define boundaries for themselves (Loughland and Ellis, 2016).

As discussed in the chapter on Professionalism, economic power is generally regarded as the most significant indicator that steers people towards their place in society, limiting their choices and aspirations through the power imposed upon them by those with economic power, namely the government in the case of teachers (Best 2004). Economic power also refers to the power which enforces and maintains the labour and class structure (Mann, in Waters, 1994). Teachers argue that in order to gain respect from society, they are entitled to appropriate remuneration, rather than the rewards and incentives which serve to bring about competition and division (Bourke, 2015). Teachers do not accept the reductionist discourses that they are subservient agents of the state (Beck, 2008) having value, or not, depending upon their usefulness to their institutions at any given time (George, 1999). However, teacher professionalism is interpreted by the government as an act of resistance in the context of performativity and economic rationalism (Bourke, 2015).

Power can be transformative, in the context of 'power to' rather than 'control over' (Waters, p 236) individuals, allowing for an acceptable existence, as institutions change and individuals have agency to change their circumstances as this process occurs. Were this to be the case for teachers, there would be no need for resistance to take place (Parsons, in Waters, 1994) and individuals would have the power, through their own agency, to create and manage their own social conditions. These conditions, however, situate the individual in a position in which the state, nevertheless, has power and control (Jones, 2004). The transformative nature of power cannot be realised with regard to the professionalism of teaching due to the lack of trust that teachers hold in the government.

Agency, therefore, can only occur when power and resistance collide (Foucault, 1980, p142; Zembylas, 2003).

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has explored the emergence of teacher resistance in the wake of radical government reforms, the international dimension, teacher activism, the phenomenon of global resistance to the neo-liberal agenda, teacher resilience and women teachers in the context of collective action, power and resistance. The increasing emotional burden of teaching, the parental and societal expectations put on teachers, the impact of governmental accountability and personal struggles are factors which have contributed to the emergence of teacher resistance and subsequent activism. Furthermore, the government perceive teacher professionalism as a form of resistance in itself.

The language of reform in 'reductionist discourses' has been instrumental in prompting activism. In particular, the flagrantly confrontational language used by the government has contributed directly to teacher activism, in spite attempts on the part of teacher unions to engage with the government to engage in dialogue to counter the negative stance. Criticism and disruption by teacher activists are constructive, allowing for agency, when transformational change is applied (Sannino, 2010). Teacher activism can be defined as the 'commitments and practices' of teachers who 'help support other teachers', working 'collectively against oppression' (Picower, 2012).

Activism is a means for sustaining the teaching profession and the professional identity of teachers. Activism is not only concerned with transformational change in discourses but also in the teacher's perceptions of their own identity and sense of self. Collaboration and mutual support are the key factors necessary for activism to take place; transformational change to the reductionist discourse of reform being the goal. Collective agency is the differentiating factor between resistance and activism as, although individuals can resist, often through non-compliant behaviour, involvement in groups leads to engagement in activism. Activism in the forms of research-based practice, systematic critical reflection and teacher-led CPD opportunities have been cited as possible ways that teachers can affect self-transformation.

Global resistance through activism has become a major part of the international landscape. The marketisation and privatisation of education through the worldwide neo-liberal agenda has been identified as a global phenomenon which threatens teacher professionalism. Some trade union activists have been successful in halting the erosion of teacher professionalism through social activism initiatives, such as social action and

'social movement unionism'. The perceived threat of the dismantling of teacher trade unions has become a reason for direct action. In some countries, research-based practice has become a common factor in resisting the GERM. However, opportunities for these practices in England are limited.

In the next chapter, I present my research methodology, demonstrating how I arrived at the decision to use narrative analysis. I state my ontological and epistemological positions and explain how I have conducted the life history interviews, identified an initial analytical approach and paid attention to an ethical framework. I use the work of Michelinos Zembylas to provide a theoretical framework to interrogate the most significant issues that arise as a result of examining data provided through the women teachers' stories. By doing so, I will be able to explore suitable data collection methods to respond to my research questions.

## **Chapter 6 – Research methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter investigates the most appropriate, authentic and creative methodology to enable me to fulfil the aim of my thesis, which is to discover, through the stories they tell, why women teachers stay in the profession and become trade union activists. I explain the rationale used to formulate my main research question and the supportive research questions. Here, I state my ontological and epistemological stances and go on to discuss the reasons for choosing this methodology. This chapter also engages with the work of Michelinos Zembylas to develop a theoretical framework which will enable me to interrogate the most significant issues that have arisen as a result of examining data provided through the women's stories. I also draw together my work in previous chapters to inform my decisions. By doing so, I am able to explore suitable data collection methods and respond to my research questions.

### **6.1 Research questions**

I have explained, through my introduction and rationale to this thesis, my own reasons for becoming a trade union activist. However, I wanted to find out if my reasons were also typical of other women teachers who were also trade union activists. Although these questions have arisen through my own personal interest, I believe that there are wider issues that need to be explored, as the literature does not go as far as to ask women teacher trade unionists themselves why they have chosen to work within the NUT as activists. To do this, I formulated my research questions.

The research was framed around the following questions:

Main question:

- To what extent, if at all, do women teachers choose to become trade union activists?

Supporting questions:

- What are women teachers' experiences of being and becoming trade union activists?
- How have policy changes to teaching shaped women teachers' trade union activism?

- What are the potential barriers that women teachers face to become trade union activists?

As I am particularly interested in people's individual lived experiences through the stories they tell, my intention for this thesis was to enable the voices of women teacher trade union activists to be listened to and heard.

Until recently, the emotional work of teaching had not been reported (Hargreaves, 1998, 2005; Kelchtermans, 1996, 2005; O'Connor, 2008; Zembylas, 2003b), yet teachers identify closely with the work they do, resulting in highly charged feelings and emotions (Nias, 1996; Hargreaves, 2005). I therefore needed to choose a methodology which would allow me to achieve my aim for this study and respond to my research questions.

However, in order to be in line with my own beliefs and principles, the methodology needed to take into account the following elements. It needed to be enabling to the participants to allow them to tell their stories from their own experiences and enable their 'voices' to be heard. It needed to be free enough in format so that I was not imposing the story on the participants, but allowing their actual voices to be presented. I needed a methodology which would allow me to remain authentic to the women teachers' stories, whilst also adhering to my initial reasons for initiating this research. It was also important that, through the methodology, I was able to honour the struggle of the women teacher activists. I was therefore obligated to find a creative, appropriate and authentic research methodology to meet the needs of the research.

## **6.2 Methodological considerations**

Before considering the data collection methods to be used for this piece of qualitative research, I considered my ontological and epistemological positioning (Hay, 2002).

Ontology concerns the claims about what constitutes one's view of the world, what exists, what we may know and what we may assume (Blaikie, 2000). It is about the philosophical knowledge of being, of reality, of becoming and of existence. Epistemology, subsequently, is concerned with how we might know what is known. It is about the nature and scope of knowledge, what knowledge is and how it might be acquired. It is a branch of philosophy which focuses on the gathering of knowledge and the development of new theories by way of discovery (Grix, 2002). With regards to my own research positioning, I considered myself to be working in an interpretive research paradigm, defining ontology as socially constructed multiple 'truths'. In believing that people have certain, specific ways of thinking and acknowledging their own 'truths' about the world, each person's view of the world is consequently unique. My epistemological position, therefore, focused on the

premise that people can think in certain ways, and considered how this knowledge could be collected, analysed and presented through an interpretivist perspective. Interpretivism does not purport that there is only one structured way of thinking and collecting data to prove that a single 'truth' exists, as does positivism, for example. The interpretivist believes that there is more than one reality and that there are multiple ways of expressing these realities, though they can be difficult to interpret (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

All qualitative research, according to Grix (2002), starts from a personal point of view, which subsequently informs the research methodology. Research methodology should not be confused with the research methods used, as methodology concerns the overarching logic of the collection of data, whereas the methods are the tools or instruments used to collect, collate and analyse the data. Once a researcher's ontological and epistemological stances have been established, the methodology for the research project should follow (Waring, 2013). A researcher's ontological and epistemological positioning will establish the research questions which will, in turn, influence the methods chosen. However, Grix (2002) believes that research should not be judged on the methods used, but rather on the cumulative process of the methodology. To bring the methodology in line with my positioning outlined here, and to consider the aim of my study, I explored appropriate theoretical orientations.

### **6.3 Deciding on the best methodological focus**

Before deciding upon the best methodological focus, I wrote a research paper based upon my thesis, entitled 'Doing Justice: finding the best methodological fit to enable the voices of women teacher trade union activists to be heard' (Laight, 2014) which was accepted for presentation at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) conference.

Having considered several possible methodologies for this study, I decided to explore storytelling, or narrative research, as a methodology. Storytelling is central to human meaning, according to Lewis (2011) who advocates that more storytelling should be used in sociological research. Similarly, Labov and Waletzky (1997) accept that stories have been used for generations in folk law, myths, legends and sagas, and that the analysis of oral traditions has always been of interest. However, although Polkinghorne (2007) suggests that storytelling is a valid means of conducting qualitative research, he also advises caution. He (Polkinghorne, 2007) argues that there are two contrasting opinions with regards to the validity of knowledge claims, one being from the conventional research community and the other being from the reformer research community, narrative research belonging to the latter (Lewis, 2009). Both communities need to show strong evidence of validity in order to make convincing knowledge claims, but there are two significant threats



to the narrative researcher. These are, firstly, the differences experienced between meaning and the stories the researchers tell about meaning, and secondly, the connections between storied texts and their interpretations. Therefore, after careful consideration and in spite of the difficulties outlined, I decided to use narrative analysis as my preferred methodology, being closest to the aims of my study.

#### **6.4 Narrative analysis**

Narrative analysis, or narrative inquiry, is a form of research analysis which enables the researcher to make sense or meaning of the stories told as part of a person's experience of life. Storytelling, according to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), is the articulation of the way people experience the world. The 'story' is synonymous with the first person, whereas 'narrative' refers to the analysis of the story. Though similar to discourse analysis (Atkinson, 2013), narrative analysis is more than an analysis of the discourse as it is written in the transcriptions (Mishler, 1991), as it seizes upon many aspects of the interview rather than purely the talk. Riessman (1993) explains that the words of the participants are spoken in a particular context, so it is important to acknowledge that specific context and note such inclusions as pauses, crying, laughter, and any other particular features of the interview, for analysis. She also advises against transcription by those other than the researcher, as someone delegated to the transcription role may not be as vigilant as the interviewer in noticing, or recalling, significant aspects of, or fully scrutinising, the data, and may miss opportunities to investigate any interpretive categories that may be beginning to emerge. Labov and Waletzky (1997) clarify that analysing narrative is complex, speculating that there may be more than one narrative present in the data collected from each interview. They argue that the two main functions of narrative analysis are formal, selecting the patterns of syntax and semantics from the narrative, and functional, indicating the temporality of the experience.

Riessman (2013) explains that narrative analysis is particularly useful to employ when dealing with disruption or change in a person's life, or group of people's lives, believing that storytelling promotes empathy. She describes how personal troubles may be located in time and space, and that the narrator may cast her/himself as the victim or the victor. Narrative analysis, using a life history interview approach (Smith, 2012), can be a transformative experience in which the narrator can feel empowered as a result of her/his awareness of their situation, although, conversely, they may initiate a negative narrative in which they are cast as the victim of low self-esteem and hopelessness. Smith (2012) and Reissman (2013) recognise the complexity that lies behind stories, acknowledging that stories cannot be objective and that the focus is on 'truths' rather than 'the' truth. Unlike

other forms of qualitative research analysis, codified or thematic categories are not wholly appropriate, as stories provide a richer, deeper set of data which can explain why decisions have been made, opinions formed or actions taken, which would otherwise have been ignored had a codified or a thematic approach been the sole tools of analysis. Although it is natural to tell a story, the analysis of a story as data is neither neat nor easy. However, this being the case, I still pursued the notion of using a narrative analysis for my study as it allowed the participants to express themselves and allowed their voices to be heard. Nevertheless, I was aware that, although the narrator has the freedom to tell the story from her/his own perspective, the researcher is in control of the data (Smith, 2012).

Georgakopoulou (2006) advocates the use of narrative analysis in what she calls 'small stories'. This refers to the stories that people tell which, used as data, are important, not only in their telling, but in what Georgakopoulou refers to as 'interactional features' and 'sites of engagement'. Cortazzi (2002) believes that narrative analysis is suited specifically to teachers' stories because it enables them to have their voices heard in an otherwise largely unexamined area. Suggesting that narrative analysis is best able to capture teachers' culture and thinking, Cortazzi demonstrates how the everyday lives of teachers may be analysed by this method, having used this methodology with interviews and journals from over a hundred teachers in Britain. Narrative analysis is considered to be an innovative technique which can be used successfully in educational research (Cortazzi, 2002; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Smith, 2012). Using life history interviews, Smith (2012) argues that these enable voices to be heard and that new insights may be gleaned, due to the richness of the data collected. Smith's research focuses mainly on women teachers, and discusses the way life history interviews allow the women teachers' voices to be heard, often resulting in reflection on and articulation of their identities, and the experiences and emotions that have contributed to the shaping of their working lives.

Narrative analysis focuses on the person, her/his world, cultural and social contexts (Patton, 2002). It purports to establish meaning through interpretation. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) discuss the nature of narrative analysis and recognise it as being *'the rejection of the 'colonialism' of objectivism and the acceptance that this is the age of relativism'* (p 36). Smeyers et al (2006) suggest that the notion of narrative analysis is confused due to the lack of understanding of this method and its subsequent failure to provide sufficiently deep analysis. However, Miller and West (1998) believe that biographical and autobiographical research methods have become more popular, due to the fragmented nature of society in general, and the lack of cohesion with regards to the traditional frames of reference. Riessman (1993) suggests that in order to make sense of their lives, people may use narrative to define their actions, and significant, or even everyday events, as part the

communal as well as the personal. She believes that the person telling the story will allow the listener into her/his 'world' to be able to make a point, citing order and meaning-making structures as to be valued. By recording (using digital voice recording technology, as opposed to transcription alone) and presenting the voices of participants, it is possible to allow their voices to be 'heard'. Narrative analysis is a useful tool to interrogate practices of power, allowing individual participants to contribute to a whole (Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992).

In order to establish meaning in interpretation, particularly in the context of the principles of power as indicated here, I decided that narrative analysis would be the best methodology for my study. Bell (1988, in Riessman, 1993) advocates narrative analysis to successfully interpret stories about women and activism, making links between the individual and collective action (cf 'DES daughters' study, 1988, in Riessman, 1993). Bell's studies indicate how a high level of detail is necessary to interpret the individual's story, and also to link this story with those of others in a particular group, to discover the roots that can lead from individual consciousness to collective activism. Smith (2012) advocates the use of life history interviews as a contribution to a social justice agenda, by recognising commonality and shared experiences in the data collected. Taking into account these issues, narrative analysis was the most authentic, appropriate and creative methodology for my thesis.

## **6.5 Constructing an ethical framework**

In order to construct an ethical framework, my stance as a researcher must be considered. Cameron et al (1992) present three types of relationship or research stance, as follows. 'Ethical research' identifies a stance in which the researcher is mindful of the interests of the participants, but sets the research agenda. 'Advocacy' identifies a stance in which the researcher carries out research on and for the participants, being accountable to the participants and using the researcher's expert knowledge on the participants' behalf. 'Empowering research' identifies a stance in which the researcher carries out research on, for and with the participants. The researcher is completely open, recognises the participants' agenda and gives access to their expert knowledge. The most appropriate definition of my researcher stance, using Cameron et al (1992) definitions, is that of 'ethical research'. Coe (2013) suggests a variety of research classifications to clarify educational research aims, which may be a single classification or a mixture of the four he suggests, namely 'Scientific', 'Political', 'Therapeutic' and 'Aesthetic'. My study sits within the 'Political' classification.

The ethical framework I constructed for my thesis was based on the ethical considerations as noted in the BERA research ethics agenda, together with the research ethics framework as set out by Leeds Beckett University. As a qualified teacher, I am also bound by the Professional Code of Conduct as stated in the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012). My research ethics approval forms are provided in Appendix 3.

## **6.6 Developing methods of data collection**

In order to allow the women teachers to tell their stories, I decided to conduct in-depth interviews, using open-ended questions. In questioning participants, the researcher influences the participant's responses. Indeed, it is possible that inappropriate questioning, such as too many questions, may be detrimental to the data if the researcher is steering the participant in a certain direction (Hammersley et al, 2001). Kvale (1996) believes that interviews constitute a dialogue between the researcher and the participant and that both make contributions. Examples of good practice can be identified when participants engage with the researcher who allows them to take as much control of the interview as possible for thick, rich data to be collected. Potter and Wetherell (1994) argue that talk from both the researcher and the participant should be taken into account in the analysis of the data.

Using open-ended questions provides flexibility, allowing participants to focus their responses on what seems most relevant to them, enabling conditions for new discovery and the unexpected. In doing this, researchers may feel more able to allow participants to talk, using probing and prompting to elicit a deeper understanding of the meaning they are making (Seeley, 1966; Hammersley et al, 2001; Smith, 2012). This process appeared to be suitable for and conducive to my data collection to allow the women teachers to speak and their 'voices' to be heard. Open-endedness, according to Smith (2012), allows individuals to discuss their experiences and perceptions, which enables them to reflect upon their lives and make meaning of them. It also provides the flexibility needed to *'harness the complexities of narrators' lives, offering rich, deep insights into the multilayered and multifarious factors that influence and frame decisions'* (Smith, 2012, p 501). Open-ended questions, therefore, are preferable to closed questions as participants feel more empowered. Bell (1988, in Riessman, 1993) explains that open-ended questions may be used effectively, particularly when there are minimal interruptions, linking intervention questions to what participants are saying, or repeating what the participants say as a prompt. Only if the researcher is comfortable with the process does Mears (2013) advocate in-depth interviews, as some researchers are not able to cope with the lack of rules and the emerging design. She suggests that researchers who intend

to use this method should be aware that participants may cancel appointments, for example, and that the researcher may not realise the energy and commitment that is needed to pursue this type of interview.

In order to allow the participants in my research study to tell their stories, I needed to be able to provide the best possible conditions for them to feel able to speak with confidence in responding to the open-ended questions I intended to ask. Unconditional positive regard, empathy and active listening (Egan, 1998; Rogers, 1965) are core attitudes for the researcher to convey to allow the participant to engage. The interview is not only a place for gathering information but also a means to enable a reality to be constructed (Hammersley et al, 2001). 'Naturalistic sampling' (Ball, 1990) considers the times, the places and the people involved in the interview process, therefore settings should be considered as well as the people. Real situations which are studied in natural settings may challenge basic assumptions, as opposed to taking things for granted and accepting the norm as defined by others (Hammersley et al, 2001; Seeley, 1966). Such qualitative research methods also encapsulate meanings, descriptions, experiences, perspectives and understandings in the data (Hammersley et al, 2001; Coolican, 1990). A depth of these elements, or 'thick description' (Denzin, 1989), presents a case for examining the emotion and the details of the context. I therefore arranged to meet the participants in locations and at times chosen by them to allow for satisfactory conditions and a safe environment.

Taking into consideration the benefits of natural settings in which to conduct the interviews, I anticipated that the participants' emotions and perspectives would be captured. These elements of 'thick description' enable the voice of the individual to be heard, invoking memories of feelings and actions, a sense of self and emotionality. Active listening during an in-depth interview is important to facilitate the gathering of appropriate data, therefore the researcher must be mindful of the body and the voice (Rogers, 1951). Empathy is an important factor as it enables appropriate prompts and probes when investigating a particular point in the participant's story (Egan, 1998), and various probing techniques may be used to elicit clarity, such as asking a follow-up question or repeating a word or a phrase used by the participant. However, it is useful to conduct a pilot study before embarking on the main data gathering, particularly if it is possible to replicate the situation in which the data is intended to be collected. It is also helpful if participants in a pilot study can provide feedback to enable appropriate improvements to the methods used (Ashley, 2013). It is for these reasons that I conducted a pilot study.

## **6.7 Piloting the proposed method**

In choosing participants, I wanted to accommodate as wide a range of women teacher activists as possible. I did not impose constraints, such as the age group of the children the women taught, their own ages, working status, location, teaching experience or particular office held in the NUT. My intention was to interview women teacher activists from wide-ranging, geographical areas around England and I began by inviting three who regularly attend the NUT Annual Conference (Appendix 1), as democratically elected delegates, to participate in the initial pilot stage of my study. I recorded the interviews on my phone, a digital audio recording device which is password-protected, to enable discretion, as it is a small, unobtrusive device, with whose operations I am familiar. Using the method of in-depth interviews to engage my first participant, I began with the open-ended question, 'Why did you become a teacher?' following this with questions about her career, her perception of changes to education policy and her perceptions of the term 'professionalism'.

I realised, from the feedback given, as suggested by Ashley (2013), that although it was positive, the interview had taken the form of a series of semi-structured interview questions to be answered, rather than allowing for the participant's story to evolve naturally. For the next interview, I decided to begin by asking the same introductory question as before, to initiate the interview. If necessary, I intended to ask the further question, 'Why did you join the NUT?' which I believed would allow for the women's stories to develop. I therefore began the second interview by asking, 'Why did you become a teacher?' and allowed the participant to tell her story. I intervened on a few occasions, repeating what she said or asking for clarification, using prompts and probes and active listening (Egan, 1998). I asked my second question, which yielded an energetic response to enable the participant to extrapolate and explore her own union activism. After further positive feedback, I engaged in the third interview, which became a more authentic version of the life histories interview, as developed by Smith (2012). This experience enabled me to continue to engage with participants with more confidence in the life history interview process.

## **6.8 Selecting the participants**

It was particularly important for me to acknowledge certain insider researcher biases, being a woman, a qualified teacher, a member of the NUT, an NUT activist, a local officer, former regional officer, Annual Conference delegate and speaker. A researcher's own background is influential to the subject of the research and the participants. Researchers bring their own bias, subjectivities, assumptions and biographies to the research (Cameron et al, 1992). Throughout this research project, it was necessary for me to

recognise the difficulty of being a detached observer and remain separated. Furthermore, once data have been collected, it was important that I was aware of my own assumptions and continued to be self-critical throughout (Bassey, 1990). In order to preserve a sense of balance as a researcher and to remain authentic to my study, I began to search for the work of others who have had similar issues. I found the work of Smith (2012) to be particularly helpful in this regard. In her research into women teachers' life histories and career decisions, She chose participants from her own circle of those whom she knew in the first instance, and subsequently recruited participants who were part of the networks of her initial sample. She was aware that her own experiences would have to be taken into account as she had a personal involvement, not only in knowing the participants, but also in the shared experience of having been a woman teacher. The recognition of personal involvement can be a strength which can enable deep, rich research data in so far as the shared experience can create empathy and strengthen the research relationship (Bheenuck, 2010, in Smith, 2012).

The selection of participants is a significantly important feature to be considered when deciding how to proceed in collecting appropriate data. In choosing my participants, I selected women who were qualified teachers and also activist members of the NUT. My choice of the NUT as the trade union from which I chose participants stems from the knowledge that, unlike other teacher unions, it is the only trade union whose members exclusively comprise teachers who have achieved qualified teacher status (QTS), and trainee teachers working towards QTS. As Judy Moorhouse, National President of the NUT (2006-2007), stated, 'QTS is the DNA of the NUT' (Moorhouse in NUT, 2013). Being an NUT member myself, I decided to use my networks and contacts to begin my search for suitable participants, as suggested by Smith (2012). In order to establish an activist position in my participants, I focused on NUT Annual Conference delegates as a starting point to my search, inviting three women who regularly attend this conference to participate in the pilot study. The NUT Annual Conference is the arena in which NUT policy is discussed, debated and decided (Appendix 1). Conference motions are democratically selected beforehand through input from committees at local and regional levels. The conference takes place during the weekend of Easter, spanning 5 consecutive days. This means that delegates display an active commitment to the conference during a holiday period in order to participate.

## **6.9 Conducting the interviews**

The fieldwork took place between January and October 2013 at various points throughout the school year. I kept a research journal to record critical events throughout the duration

of the fieldwork, noting the locations, venues, times and circumstances in which the interviews took place, being aware of Ball's acknowledgement of 'Naturalistic sampling' (Ball, 1990). I interviewed 11 women from five different NUT demarcated regions across England, ranging from the Northern, North West, Yorkshire/Midland, South East and London regions. Together, these women held local, regional and national officer status, their ages ranged from mid-30s to mid-60s, eight were serving teachers and three were retired teachers who spent a significant amount of time volunteering at their regional offices. To describe the women further using individual details may result in identification which would present an ethical risk; I therefore applied designated pseudonyms to each participant for each piece of interview data I collected.

It was of particular note that each woman was in a situation that involved multitasking. I interviewed two participants who were on a residential NUT course, and as time and space were at a premium the evening I joined them, I interviewed one woman before dinner, in a corridor, having to wait for a noisy food trolley to pass us in order to continue the interview. The other interview took place after dinner beneath a staircase, as this was the quietest spot at the time. One participant was interviewed at her school on the first day of the school summer holidays, where she was tidying up the remnants of the final weeks of her work that term and would be revisiting the school during the holiday to prepare for the following term. Another participant was interviewed in a hotel room after a very long day's conference attendance. I visited a regional office, originally to interview a participant who was volunteering there. A colleague staffed the phone lines whilst the interview took place and I subsequently interviewed the colleague whilst the first participant reciprocated.

During the school summer holidays, I had arranged to meet a participant who had been meeting with her local authority in her official NUT role. She had an NUT colleague with her who had also attended the meeting, so I interviewed them both at the same time. We sat outside a cafe and the interview was interrupted by the sirens of a selection of emergency service vehicles passing by. Another colleague was interviewed at home where she was also supervising her child and her child's friend as they played in the garden. I interviewed a colleague who was 'on call' for a specific piece of urgent union casework. The interview was punctuated by a phone call from a colleague in distress. Another interview took place after an NUT committee meeting. This colleague had arrived at the meeting straight from school so the interview took place as she ate her evening meal.

In every case, I began by asking the participant the question, 'Why did you become a teacher?' Considering the warnings of Mears (2013) in connection to the need for the



researcher to be comfortable and flexible in allowing participants to speak without interruption, I engaged in active listening, using prompts such as repeating the participant's last remark to enable them to regain the thread of their story when appropriate. I presented unconditional, positive regard through openness of body language and smiled and nodded appropriately as they spoke to communicate acknowledgement of their engagement, displayed through their words, gestures or other non-verbal cues such as laughter. When I considered the participant had told me as much as she wanted in order to respond to the initial question, I continued by asking, 'Why did you join the NUT?' Again, I allowed the participants time to respond, prompting and engaging as before. When they appeared to have responded fully to this question, I asked them finally, 'Is there anything else you would like to say?' In some instances, participants continued to relate further thoughts, whilst others did not. Each interview recording was then transferred from my phone to my password-protected laptop computer for processing and analysis.

#### **6.10 Validity**

Testing the validity of qualitative research data can be challenging, and although some researchers state that it is important to obtain accurate data and to analyse it with as little bias as possible (Kvale, 1996; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Wollcott, 2005), this process is not without its difficulties. Reissman (1993) believes that validation in qualitative research is more about 'trustworthiness' than 'truth'. She states that the notion of validity and validation in qualitative research needs to be reconceptualised, and cites Geertz's (1983, in Reissman, 1993) notion of 'blurred genre' to indicate her stance. Furthermore, Reissman cites White (1992, in Reissman, 1993) to explain that in practice people do not usually make up stories and that what participants disclose to a researcher will usually be 'trustworthy', albeit their version of the 'truth'.

I have endeavoured to demonstrate, in this research study, that I have demonstrated an awareness of the need to prevent misinterpretation or undue bias. Smith (2012) suggests that an insider researcher cannot be objective, and this can influence the data collection and analysis. She cautions that the data should not be misinterpreted or misrepresented because of researcher bias, although it should not be presumed that because the researcher has some sense of knowing about the participants' lives and culture that she/he can be certain of what the data will reveal. As far as my research study was concerned, the in-depth, life history interviews were designed to enable the women teachers to speak and to be enhanced by the guidance and sensitivity that I endeavoured to provide during the interviews. Not only their words, but their silences, laughter,

repetition, pauses, reflections, etc were recorded, as accurately as possible, both on the digital audio recording device and in the transcripts.

Instead of constantly pitting qualitative and quantitative methods against each other, Wollcott (2002) argues that '*all research is based on observational data*' (p99) and therefore it should be recognised that each type of research can enhance the other. Wallcott suggests that the research results are more important than the methods, and the techniques of fieldwork are subsidiary to the methods. He therefore advises the researcher to concentrate on the research outcomes rather than spending time emphasising the difficulties of validation in qualitative research, arguing that data which concern the everyday lives of participants are more interesting when they have been appropriately prepared and analysed. He suggests that there would be more opportunity for discovery in the data if the researcher were less concerned with the justification of validation and more involved with its analysis.

### **6.11 Data processing and analysis**

Once the interviews were recorded, I listened to each one again to familiarise myself with what the women had said. To foster further familiarisation, I transcribed each interview myself, transferring the data from spoken to written form to enable analysis. It is important to distinguish between data summaries, data analysis and data interpretation; a clear separation between the data collection, interpretation and analysis processes needs to occur so that the researcher does not confuse these stages, which could result in the effectiveness of the research being compromised (Coolican, 1990; Feldman, 1995). Raw data, such as direct quotes from participants, may be more succinct than the researcher's interpretation (Coolican, 1990). Wolcott (1990) suggests that data should be sorted by categories in the first instance, although he also states that sorting at source will have already taken place, an example of which may be noted in my research study, where female participants have already been sorted apart from males.

Having collected data through life history interviews, I looked for patterns in the raw data from the women's stories whereby similarities and differences could be identified, along with specific incidents, categories or events (Hutchinson, 1988). Smith (2012) used a simple coding system in her research into women teachers' career decisions to identify themes emerging from the stories she had collected in the first instance. This enabled her to record similarities on a superficial basis, before getting into deeper, richer data analysis. Although she looked for commonalities in the stories as a whole, her desire was to preserve the integrity of the women teachers' individual stories which she did by familiarising herself thoroughly with the data. Following the example of Smith (2012), I

used a similar initial analytical approach, believing it to work effectively in my research study.

### **6.12 Initial analytical approach**

Having collected data through life history interviews, I listened to the recorded interviews again to familiarise myself with the data more thoroughly. I transcribed each interview, noting pauses, sighs, laughter and other such events punctuating the flow of speech. I looked for patterns to identify any similarities and differences as well as specific incidents, categories or events (Hutchinson, 1988). Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest what they refer to as 'pawing' as an early intervention to identify themes. For this technique, they recommend the use of highlighter pens to indicate themes, which is the advice I followed.

Smith (2012) however, deliberates as to whether or not to impose codes and thus impose a personal stance in prioritising the data. Ryan and Bernard (2003) concur with the principle of data familiarisation, reading and re-reading the raw data, getting a 'feel' for themes, citing Dey (1993 in Ryan and Bernard, 2003) who advocates exploring the data intuitively this way. In order to get a feel for the main issues that had arisen in the women teachers' lives, I listened to each recorded interview several times to establish a deeper familiarity. I transcribed each interview myself to avoid inaccuracies or misunderstandings in interpreting the women's voices (Reissman, 1993). I assigned a pseudonym to each participant to ensure anonymity, in keeping with their age, ethnicity and location. It is important when using narrative analysis to gain a depth of understanding of each of the stories to be able to present 'voices' as authentically as possible. It is also important to be familiar with the data to enable the analysis to be presented in depth (Smith, 2012). Once I had gained an overview of the participant's story, I made notes to present a brief vignette, describing the essence of what each woman was saying. Having repeated this process for all 11 participants, I was able to identify broad, emergent themes which would be suitable for engagement in answering my research questions.

### **6.13 Developing a theoretical framework**

In order to respond to my research questions and address the aim of my thesis, I developed a theoretical framework to provide guidance and inform, describe, explain and advance my research. I was initially drawn to the work of Michel Foucault who discusses the notion of social control through institutions, power, oppression and resistance. However, through this exploration, my attention was drawn to Michalinos Zembylas whose research is founded upon Foucauldian principles but encapsulates the specific nature of teachers teaching in schools and the emotional labour they undertake in their work which

can impact negatively upon them, leading to stress and 'burnout'. I decided to focus on the work of Zembylas to provide theoretical guidance, as his research focuses on emotion and affect in education, and political and social justice issues, highlighting issues of teacher identity, teachers' self-formation, the emotional labour of teaching, resistance and power, and also elucidates the concepts of 'emotional ecology' and 'knowledge ecology' (2007). These themes can readily be identified with the data produced through the women's stories.

#### **6.14 Zembylas's links to Foucault's work**

Rooted in the social theory of post-structuralism, which explores the construction of meaning, Zembylas cites the work of Michel Foucault as a significant exponent of this thinking, examining the de-construction of discourses which concern power relationships. Although other post-structural thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes (Ransome, 2010), also explored the construction of meaning through textual analysis and examined social discourses, Foucault believed that by studying discourse, he was also studying power. He summarised the link between language, knowledge and action as 'discursive practices' (Jones, 2004, p146). He considered institutional frameworks in relation to social control, citing 'the rules of exclusion and hierarchy that dictate ... social power' (Resch, 1992, p234). Citing discipline as a form of excluding people from each other, Foucault presented the notion of each person as becoming 'a cog in a machine' (Waters, 1994, p232).

Zembylas's work, albeit in the field of education, makes links to Foucault's thinking in so far as it is primarily derived from a health/illness perspective, such as institutionalisation, hospitalisation, and the medicalisation of life processes like childbirth and death.

Zembylas links this thinking on power through discourse and discursive practices with a lens on education and the profession of teaching. The normalization of the expectations in some areas of teaching, together with internal rules and norms, and rules of exclusion leading to social control through institutional frameworks, are frequently identified as lenses in Zembylas's work. Concurring with Foucault's thinking, Zembylas believes that discursive practices go further than describing the state of the world, but actually create the state of the world (Jones, 2004).

Foucault cited discipline, training and surveillance as the main techniques of imposing power. Parallels may be drawn in citing government control through the neo-liberal education policy of accountability as discussed in previous chapters of my thesis. Foucault argued that training is a process whereby norms are established and standards are set, resulting in testing to show that the norms have been realised. Surveillance refers to

constant monitoring and inspection citing the visibility of 'panopticism' as a thorough means of control (Jones, 2004). The Panopticon, from which the notion of 'panopticism' derives, was developed in 1791 by Jeremy Bentham as a physical tower designed to be used to make it possible to observe every movement made by prisoners from a central vantage point (Best, 2004, p163). A prisoner, therefore, was seduced into believing the assumption that he was constantly being observed, ultimately leading to the phenomenon of 'self-surveillance' (Jones, 2004). Foucault believed that this situation suggested that, as the prisoner perceived that he was constantly being observed, rather than being disciplined, he was being trained. This form of training, according to Foucault, was the same method that was used in teacher training institutions, involving a hierarchy of authority, universal standards of performance and 'normalised' judgements (Waters, 1994, p232).

The themes which Foucault invokes, consisting of power through discourse and discursive practices, social control through institutional frameworks, regulation, surveillance, panopticism and self-surveillance, all resonate within the work of Zembylas. Moreover, Foucault's perceptions of teacher training institutions and their performative roles are strands which permeate Zembylas's work. Over time, Zembylas has successfully refined the work of Foucault, taking on themes and related aspects of his thinking, by exploring the nature of teachers' emotions in the development, identification and construction of teacher identity, citing post-structuralist theory as the most effective means of analysis. He maintains that the 'emotional rules' in teaching are complex and need to be analysed to enable 'teacher identity' to be constructed (Zembylas, 2005, p936).

### **6.15 Zembylas and teacher emotions**

Rather than pursuing a theoretical stance relating to sociological or psychological frameworks, Zembylas acknowledges emotions as a discursive practice. Although he cites research on emotions which is grounded in the disciplines of psychology, sociology, psychobiology, philosophy, anthropology, cultural studies and feminist studies, he believes that emotions are rooted in language, culture and power relations, rather than being socially constructed or existentially private (Zembylas, 2003b, p215). He argues that teachers' emotions are directly related to their sense of identity, particularly in the way in which they 'understand, experience, perform and talk about emotions', indicating that teachers are not passive recipients of an emotional life but actors recognised as forming and re-forming their own identities (Zembylas, 2005, p937). He believes that the 'discourse of experience' is more important than the experience itself, as 'emotions are experienced in relation to the 'teacher-self' (individual reality), the others (social

interactions) and the school politics and culture in general (socio-political context)' (Zembylas, 2005, p938). Teachers' identities are therefore not constant (Zembylas, 2003a, 2005).

Drawing on the work of feminist thinking, Zembylas explores the question of emotion versus reason, challenging the notion that an emotional response is irrational (Zembylas, 2003b, p217). Indeed, both feminist and socio-cultural perspectives contest the premise that the emotional and the rational are at odds, citing political drivers as the rationale for the perpetuation this ideal. Zembylas suggests that emotion and reason are interdependent, explaining that decision-making is often dependent on emotional response, citing the work of Damasio who explains that 'effective social behaviour is dependent on feelings and emotions just as much as on the objective ability to reason' (Damasio, 1994 in Zembylas, 2003b, p 217).

Social and political experiences will affect emotions and emotional responses, supporting the claim that emotions are not always private and personal but also constructed through social experiences and social relationships. Zembylas's work explores the possible effects that emotions can have on teachers, particularly in the formation of identity and sense of self, as indicators for empowerment or constraint, which could lead to changes in their teaching (2003b, p218). Zembylas argues that emotion is related to power, being both personal and social, and therefore intrinsic to the formation of a teacher's identity and sense of self. Therefore, teachers will suppress and even compromise their true emotions in order to present appropriate behaviour and discourse which befits the culture of the school (2003a, p112).

This reinforcement of cultural norms through performativity strengthens the existence of the emotional rules and hegemony that exists within the school. In an attempt to control their negative emotions, such as anger, disappointment and frustration, teachers will self-regulate, displaying positive emotions, thus neutralising their responses. In an effort to manage negative emotions, teachers suppress them in order to present themselves as acceptable to students and colleagues, though this mechanism can be used to the detriment of their wellbeing (Zembylas, 2007). As a result of negative emotions, teachers can experience a sense of vulnerability, worthlessness, powerlessness, inadequacy and shame. With regard to the discursive environment and the actors therein, Zembylas describes how a sense of shame and embarrassment has made teachers feel unworthy as their 'perceived deficiencies are paraded and an internalised audience with the capacity to judge them is created' (2003b, p228).

#### **6.16 Identity and self-formation**

Zembylas recognises that, in recent years, the notion of 'teacher identity' has become of interest in the field of research, due to significant social and cultural changes (2003a; 2003b; 2005). He explores, through his work, what he calls 'the messy meanings of teacher identity as it comes to be constituted through social interactions, performances and daily negotiations within a school culture' (2003a, p109). The 'messiness' he refers to is the idea that teacher identity is not constant or stable, but is a continually shifting state, reinvented and re-established through power relations (2003a; 2003b).

Zembylas argues that, in order to achieve an insight into 'self-formation' and an understanding of a sense of self, teachers must first understand the unstable concept of 'teacher identity'. To gain an awareness of one's self as a teacher, through the media of narrative research, articulation and exploration, social interaction and self-presentation, is to allow for change to the popular assumptions of the constructs of 'teacher identity' and the 'teacher self' (2003a, p107). These assumptions disregard the generating of practices and performances which occur on a daily basis, constituting changes to the nature of these constructs. It is the interrelation of emotion, self-awareness and self-knowledge that Zembylas believes will allow the social construct of teacher identity to be de-constructed and owned by teachers themselves. Furthermore, he explores the possibility that teachers, armed with this new knowledge, can move away from the popular cultural myths of teacher identity and begin to make changes through resistance and self-transformation (2003b, p214).

The term 'genealogy of emotions in teaching' is used by Zembylas to identify the links between 'the personal, cultural, political and historical aspects of teacher identity formation' in order to explore how teachers' emotions shape and are shaped by the landscape in which they teach (2003a, p111). In an attempt to re-define their identity, teachers can begin to explore ways in which Zembylas's genealogies interlink to re-establish authenticity in their sense of identity and sense of self. To illustrate the possibility of transformational change, Zembylas advocates autobiographical reflection and storytelling to enable the reconstruction of new discourses leading to alternative perspectives. He believes that by doing this, teachers can become 'political forces' for change within education (2003, p126).

Using a poststructuralist lens, Zembylas explores the way in which meaning relates to experience, interrogating the discourse of the experience rather than the experience in isolation. Using poststructuralist thinking, he explores the socio-political rationale that has an effect on teacher identity, which enables the teacher 'to develop a sense of agency in their lives and to construct strategies of power and resistance' (2003b, p223). Teachers

typically interact with students, colleagues and parents, as well as others in their personal and private lives in different contexts, which may also be taken into account. However, in their professional lives, teacher identity is structured through the recognition and affirmation of others, thus validation would ensure a positive image. It is important, therefore, for teachers to be aware of the shifting nature of their status in the minds of others through discourse to enable them to continue to 'become'. Zembylas examines the narratives of subjectivity against those of culture to elucidate how identities 'become' over time as they constantly reinvent themselves. He argues that inter-subjective discourses, experiences and emotions can eventually provide new meanings and subsequent change (2003b, p221).

By employing the methodology of narrative research in his own work, Zembylas cites the work of Connelly and Clandin which explains the importance of teachers knowing themselves and the context of their work and work spaces, in order to highlight the discourses and discursive practices in which they are involved (Zembylas, 2003b, p 214 and 2006; Connelly and Clandin, 1987, 1995, 1998 and 1999 in Zembylas, 2003a, p214). Narrative research allows teachers to explore the emotional components of their work in the context of their social, cultural and institutional discourses, leading to issues of power and agency. Zembylas discusses the role of narrative research and storytelling, examining the features of extracting meaning to enable an understanding of discursive environments and the construction of identities. He cites Hochschild (1983 in Zembylas 2003a, p215) as an exponent of narrative research who indicates that it is through feelings that experiences may be captured and recounted, and that emotions can evoke self-relevance. It is through the stories they tell that teachers are able to construct their own identities and self-formations. In co-authoring their own narratives, Zembylas believes that teachers can take ownership of the construction of their own identities thus achieving an understanding of their possible roles in the scheme of power and resistance that is taking place in their discursive environments, thus leading to possibilities of self-formation (2003a, p108).

In order to begin the journey to discover authentic self-formation, Zembylas purports the notion of 'self-transformation', which allows the teachers' agency and power to come into play (2003b, p229). Such a transformative change entails the breaking of normative emotional rules, ignoring the self-regulatory messages and consequently taking action that opposes the cultural conventions (2005, p946). In this way, teachers are able to find their own voice. Having developed an awareness of the discursive practices within the institution, together with an awareness of the possibilities of their own emotional responses, teachers are able to begin to resist the negative emotions that have become familiar to them.



By developing a personal awareness of the possibilities of resistance, resistance in the collective is the logical sequential action to facilitate empowerment (2003b, p230). Emotions are interrelated to political and moral dimensions, as teachers, committed to their work, begin to engage in political action as a way of coping with the vulnerability they perceive (2003b, p231). Through the stories they tell within their institutional teams and wider communities of practice, 'teachers may become better able to theorise about their own struggles in the complex process of becoming' (2003b, p231), resulting in strategies of collective activism leading to authentic self-formation.

### **6.17 Emotional labour**

The role of caring in the teaching that exists in the classroom, according to Zembylas (2006), sets the scene for the emotional labour experienced by teachers committed to their profession. How teachers perform emotional labour is linked to the professional stance and beliefs in the role of caring. He argues that the area of emotional labour has not been thoroughly explored despite this being a significant element of teaching. Although acknowledging the existence of other research which links caring to good teaching, Zembylas argues that 'the emotional labour of caring' is not usually discussed with the importance it deserves (2006, p121).

Often portrayed as the 'caring' teacher, Zembylas defies this convention as comparatively superficial in the light of the performance of emotional labour that teachers undertake. He cites Goldstein (2000, in Zembylas, 2006, p121) who presents the notions of commitment, intimacy and passion as the hallmark of a caring teacher, both in the classroom and as a teacher educator, as one of the researchers who fail to elucidate the emotional labour that teachers must undertake to enable success in educational goals. Zembylas purports that 'the relationship between emotional labour and caring teaching is much more complicated' (2006, p122), but acknowledges that 'it is often difficult to tell caring and emotional labour apart' (2006, p133). He explains that attention must be paid to the interactions between the positive and negative aspects of emotional labour, and that 'caring', although acknowledged as an important aspect of teaching, is more than being sensitive to the needs of students in their professional practice (Noddings, 1984, and Rogers and Webb, 1991, in Zembylas, 2006, p122).

Zembylas explores the types of caring that can be located within teaching and learning, believing that there is more than one all-encompassing definition. He proposes 'pedagogical' caring, which refers to the care of students' academic expectations; 'moral' care, which refers to the values communicated in learning; and 'cultural' caring, which communicates the norms of the institutional culture (2006, p132). Caring relationships for

the teacher, although often producing professional satisfaction, can also produce negative effects of emotional labour, the demands of which often unrecognised. Teachers can be caught up in a scenario in which they have to regulate or neutralise their emotions in order to function professionally, particularly when their own emotions are incompatible with the emotions of their students or colleagues (2006, p123).

The result of suppressing authentic emotions can be exacerbated through feelings of stress and alienation, sometimes causing 'burnout' due to the demands of emotional labour and the incongruencies evidenced through the pressures of managing work in order to be in line with institutional expectations. Zembylas makes the distinction between 'emotional labour' and 'emotional work' to explain that the latter is commensurate with the intention, as opposed to the former, where this refers to the actions taken by the teacher to improve how the students feel. However, he acknowledges that some teachers can find emotional labour rewarding, particularly when the teacher's actions have a positive impact on the lives of the pupils, yet, paradoxically, negative aspects of emotional labour, such as feelings of disappointment and frustration, can also be evidenced in the damage caused to their emotional wellbeing. This contradiction is apparent in the work that teachers do; the emotional labour involved both enabling and harming them at the same time. Teachers, therefore, can be seen to be enjoying the labour that has the potential to damage and sabotage their wellbeing, which, though paradoxical, is the reality of teaching.

### **6.18 Emotional ecology**

Through exploring the landscape of emotions and the emotional labour of teaching, Zembylas considers emotional ecology as a means of making sense of the emotional conditions of teaching. Using the term 'emotional ecology', the origins of which can be found in organisational theory (Frost et al, 2000 in Zembylas, 2007, p357), Zembylas argues that this term indicates the forum in which interaction is performed through an environment, the core of which is populated by teachers and students. Zembylas explains what he refers to as a teacher's 'knowledge ecology', which involves the cohesion of 'content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of learners, emotional knowledge, knowledge of educational values and goals, and so on' (2007, p356). This 'knowledge ecology', together with the actors of teachers and students, combined with other agents, such as the classroom, resources, parents, the school and the wider community, is what constitutes 'emotion ecology'.

A teacher's emotional knowledge, according to Zembylas, is defined as situated in a specific social or political context. This includes relationships within the teachers' context,

such as the school, and the emotional experiences they have encountered with other agents in the context. He believes that, throughout their careers, 'teachers are both products and producers of their own emotional development' (2007, p357). Citing the lack of attention paid to teachers' emotional knowledge, Zembylas argues that this claim is an important and valuable entity in the study of teachers' knowledge, explaining that traditionally, teacher knowledge is acknowledged purely as a cognitive element. Using teachers' stories as a basis for recent research, Zembylas believes that teachers have the ability to draw upon their emotional understanding to form pedagogical practices (Zembylas, 2007, p358).

Taking the notion of 'emotional ecology' in teaching further, Zembylas proceeds to explore the relationship between this and the notion of 'pedagogical content knowledge' (PCK). By doing this, he attempts to foreground the emotional aspects of teachers' work.

### **6.19 Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)**

Schulman's (1986 and 1987) work on PCK is the building block for Zembylas's exploration of the possibilities of combining the concepts of emotional ecology with PCK. Taking into account previous research on teachers' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices (2007, p355), Zembylas continues to focus on these themes and on the interrelations between these and the emotional dimensions of teachers' work, exploring the challenges of how teachers can develop an understanding of the aspects of teaching and learning. Believing that a teacher's PCK is intrinsic to emotional aspects of teaching, Zembylas argues that the role of teachers' emotional knowledge needs to be examined, citing the complexity of teacher knowledge. He makes connections between emotional ecology and PCK in his research with teachers, where he cites the importance of teacher emotion in the curriculum, which combines teacher knowledge and emotional knowledge in the context of the social and the political within the school.

According to Schulman (1986, 1987), there are two types of teacher knowledge, these being subject knowledge and knowledge of curriculum development. Taking Schulman's work further to include emotional knowledge, Zembylas introduces a model in which 'planes' describe and identify emotional ecology and types of emotional knowledge. His model proposes an 'individual plane', in which personal, emotional connections to subject matter, emotional experiences and self-awareness are recorded; a 'relational plane' which describes the emotional affiliations with students and the emotional climate of the classroom; and the 'socio-political plane' in which the emotional understanding of the institution, including power relations, are recorded, impacting upon the teacher's decisions and actions (2007, p358). In using this model in his research, teachers were able to

record their personal and classroom emotional ecologies and emotional knowledge which, in turn, enabled them to develop their PCK. They were also able to evaluate the impact of positive and negative emotions in the execution of their teaching, discovering the cohesion between these and the resulting development of their PCK. The practice of teaching social justice was particularly significant to Zembylas's research, as this is seen to be a highly emotional area of the curriculum and of teachers' experiences. In taking part in the teaching of social justice lessons, teachers experienced a development in their own emotional knowledge, whilst being more aware of the emotional ecology in their classrooms, such as the attitudes, practices and convictions, enabling emotional transformations (2007, p364).

Zembylas believes that teachers need to be aware of their own emotional understanding in order to connect this with pedagogy, school expectations and discourses, and attitudes, which may result in competing emotional ecologies. A teacher's emotional knowledge, together with their own experiences, subject knowledge and attitudes combine to formulate a specific emotional ecology. Zembylas concludes that emotional ecology is 'an active and ongoing construction by teachers that structures and situates their teaching, as much as being constructed and situated by it' (2007, p365). Emotional ecology, therefore, appears to be of value to the individual and also the collective. Zembylas encourages teachers to take control of their own personal and professional development in this way, using the lens of emotional ecology, together with the notion of PCK, to enable clarity in their work. In an attempt to bring the emotional work of teaching into the foreground, Zembylas successfully presents the merging of emotional ecology with PCK which, he argues, 'should not be left in the dark any longer' (2007, p366).

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how I arrived at the decision to use narrative analysis as my preferred methodology. I have stated my ontological and epistemological positions; I have explained how I conducted the life history interviews, identified an initial analytical approach and have paid attention to an ethical framework. I have used the work of Michelinos Zembylas to provide a theoretical framework to interrogate the most significant issues that have arisen as a result of examining data provided through the women teachers' stories. By doing so, I have been able to explore suitable data collection methods to respond to my research questions.

The next chapter presents my interpretation of some of the main themes and sub-themes that have emerged from the data. Having conducted an initial analytical approach, I show how I began by 'pawing' to get the 'feel' of the data (Ryan and

Bernard, 2003). I then systematically began to code the data to identify themes. At the same time as I was coding the data in its entirety, I kept a record of individual themes that occurred in each participant's interview transcript. At the end of coding each individual transcript, I collated and listed each theme the participant had presented, counting the instances when these had occurred. In using the words of the participants themselves, I try to represent their 'voices' as far as it is possible to do this. I show that I have constantly revisited the original raw data to keep their 'voices' in focus, rather than mine.

## **Chapter 7 – Findings: Participants' own narratives and perceptions**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents my interpretation of some of the main themes and sub-themes that have emerged from the data. Having conducted an initial analytical approach, as described in the research methodology chapter, I began by 'pawing' to get the 'feel' of the data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). I then systematically began to code the data to identify themes.

There were 19 themes emerging, the three most popular being Tensions, Activism and Identity. These three themes were represented significantly more often than any others overall. Tensions occurred 154 times, whilst Activism and Identity occurred 133 and 110 times respectively. The 4<sup>th</sup> placed theme was Professional Integrity/Commitment, which occurred 59 times, significantly fewer times than the first three themes. In ranking order, the other themes that became apparent, occurring between 21 and 51 times were Support, Family/Personal, Career/Training (described usually to contextualise a time, location or incident), Empowerment, Cooperation/Collective and Resilience. Below these, in ranking order from 10-20, were Government Control, Voice, Government Changes, followed by those themes occurring less than 10 times, namely Surveillance and Accountability, Trade Union Background, Work/Life Balance, NUT Global Work, Critical Incident, NUT Continued Professional Development (CPD).

At the same time as I was coding the data in its entirety, I kept a record of individual themes that occurred in each participant's interview transcript. At the end of coding each individual transcript, I collated and listed each theme the participant had presented, counting the instances when these had occurred. I then highlighted the three most often occurring themes for each participant (Appendices 4 and 5). All 11 participants discussed Tensions as part of their three most frequently mentioned themes, 10 participants discussed Activism as a recurring theme and 7 referred to Identity as one of their top three major themes. I believe that a strong case has been made, due to the greater overall representation of the data, to focus on the findings primarily from the three main themes that had come through the data as a whole. However, although tensions initially emerged as a theme, as I worked through the data I could see that these tensions had different foci which are reflected in subsequent sections.

The main focus in the theme of Tensions that became clear was that of professionalism. Therefore, I used Perceptions of Professionalism as the title for the first main theme, with three sub-sections, referring to the threat of the neo-liberal agenda and the notion of emotional work, perceptions of professionalism in the NUT, and the issues of retaining teacher professionalism and family life. The title for the next main theme was Activism, presenting three sub-sections which encompassed the roots of activism, fostering empowerment in self and others, and activism in leadership roles in the NUT. I used the title of Identity for the third main theme, which focuses on instability and a sense of 'becoming', identity as a teacher and a trade union activist, and the influences of family on identity. These three themes inform my analysis as they draw on the key concepts of my literature review. In this way, they will help me to answer my research questions. The concepts have developed in terms of an inductive approach to my analysis. The biographical data inform the analysis by presenting greater depth to the participants' background and experience. This data contextualises their backgrounds and the extent of their activism.

I have used the participant's own words to explain each of these three themes in turn. I have introduced each main theme and focused on the participant's words from the raw data to clarify the issues that meant something to them. It was my intention to represent the voices of these participants rather than interpret them, although Fine (1994, in Smith, 2012) cautions that it is difficult not to be patronising when the researcher is in control of the data. I am also aware that by not using a phenomenological approach, it is not possible to focus on the voice alone. However, I have tried to strike a balance. In using the words of the participants themselves, I have tried to represent their 'voices' as far as it is possible to do this. I have constantly revisited the original raw data to keep their 'voices' in focus, rather than mine. Furthermore, I have provided initial information about the participants themselves to elicit clarity and enable links to the data as the themes unfold. This will eventually illuminate the analysis of the data.

Having selected the participant's words to reflect the three main themes, it became clear that sub-themes were emerging. Some of these echoed the 16 themes that were noted in my original coding exercise, which included Professional Integrity, Control, Family and Changes. The themes of Support, Empowerment, Resilience, Accountability, Trade Union Background and Critical Incident could also be seen threading through the participant's stories. These sub-themes are used as subheadings throughout this chapter.

## **7.1 The participants**

In this section I introduce the participants through a series of vignettes to contextualise their backgrounds and the extent of their activism.

### **7.1.1 JENNY**

A young, single parent, Jenny gained qualifications incrementally through evening classes to enable her to secure a place on a teacher training course. She was dependent primarily on her mother for childcare in order to attend university and her school placements. Her mother's influence resonated with her own philosophy of fairness. Her determination to maintain fairness is exemplified in her commitment to doing what she believes to be right. Her activism began due to tensions caused by a health and safety issue that occurred in the run-up to Christmas. Jenny became the NUT school rep, fighting for the rights of the teachers in her school and attending NUT meetings locally and regionally. She subsequently became involved with her regional office as a part-time volunteer to provide help and support for teachers in need. She has supported strike action in this role through organising resources and stewarding.

### **7.1.2 PENNY**

Having been brought up in an environment in which socialism was an accepted part of daily life, Penny joined the NUT as a natural step in becoming a qualified teacher. As a result of Penny's trade unionism, she has become very active in founding and pioneering campaigns to highlight the contentious issues in education, engaging in such areas as the Anti Academies Alliance, the scrapping of baseline testing and the '68 is far too late' campaign - resisting the extension of the retirement age for teachers. Being an early years specialist, she is a keen advocate of play, and believes that women teachers should be encouraged to speak up and engage with educational debates and policies with the support of the NUT.

### **7.1.3 ANNA**

Having resisted a career in teaching initially, Anna's mother's example ultimately influenced her choices in becoming a teacher and a trade unionist. Anna has subsequently developed a strong team of NUT teacher activists in her large secondary school, who work collaboratively both in school and in the NUT. She has instigated and developed a women's network in her area which encourages women teachers to actively engage with NUT and educational issues on a wider platform. By doing this, she has inspired a large number of women to take an active part in



their own professional trajectories both in school and in the union. She has been democratically elected to a high level executive position in the NUT.

#### **7.1.4 LISA**

Although a qualified teacher, Lisa found it increasingly difficult to obtain a permanent teaching post due to schools employing teaching assistants to cover classes. She therefore began working as a supply teacher and subsequently became involved with the NUT which enabled her to find out what issues were being raised in education and how this involved her in her new role. Becoming the vice president of her local association allowed Lisa to gain confidence and self-esteem in her work as a supply teacher. However, as a supply teacher, she has experienced first-hand the difficulties in dealing with supply agencies, whereby her pay and conditions are not adhered to as agreed by the Burgundy Book (the agreement regarding teachers' pay and conditions) and her rate of pay is reduced. She has to fight this situation on a daily basis and she sees her commitment to the NUT as a reciprocal arrangement, not only through the national NUT policy on supply teachers' pay and conditions, but also through the support and encouragement she is afforded by her NUT colleagues in her local association.

#### **7.1.5 ROSE**

Rose's activism was gradual mainly due to the fact that she was not only a serving teacher, but also a single parent with two children. She was encouraged by the NUT members in her school to engage through meetings and was consequently invited as an observer to the annual conference where her children could be looked after in the crèche. Rose's activism grew, as did her career. She became a head teacher whilst remaining an active NUT member, providing fair treatment for her staff and students. She was not tempted to join the head teachers' union, NAHT. Rose ultimately achieved a high level position in the NUT as a democratically elected national president. Although retired, she continues to volunteer her skills at her regional office, supporting teachers through case work. She is also the equalities officer for her local association and is active on relevant committees both across the NUT and nationally.

#### **7.1.6 YASMIN**

By the time Yasmin was 17, she was married with children. Whilst attending an International Women's Day event, she was encouraged by a lecturer to enrol on an access course. She was also encouraged to volunteer at a local primary school. The

access course and her volunteering fostered her love of learning and the beginning of an arduous road to her being accepted on to a teacher training course. As a BME woman, Yasmin soon became aware of the unfairness of the education system, which confirmed her resolve to do something to redress the balance. Her confidence grew as she engaged first with university life and consequently with life as a trainee teacher on placement in school. Yasmin became an active member of her NUT local association and is a regular speaker at annual conference. She is a strong advocate for giving children a voice and has embedded the school council principles into everything important in her school, such as recruiting primary school council members to the interview panel for new staff. Yasmin has encouraged women teachers, especially Black Minority Ethnic (BME) women teachers, to become active in the union, particularly championing diversity and inclusion.

#### **7.1.7 MAUREEN**

As an early career teacher who qualified in the 1960s, Maureen found herself the youngest teacher in the school. She became an NUT member initially as a source of friendship and a need for belonging, particularly to a group of people of her own age. Through her peers, Maureen eventually became involved with the social side of the NUT. Maureen ultimately became very involved with the NUT and was an activist throughout her career, becoming the division president, secretary of the Teachers' Benevolent Fund and working on a host of local and regional committees. She had been on strike in the 1970s and her adult life has been integrated with NUT work and teaching. When she retired, Maureen committed a large amount of her time to working as a volunteer in her regional office. She is an advocate for disabled teachers and has continued to attend courses to maintain a current knowledge and understanding. She also supports teachers in need through her role at the regional office.

#### **7.1.8 CAROL**

Carol became a teacher in 1973, following in her father's career footsteps. Her family background shaped her sense of self as she entered teaching and became involved in the NUT. Carol's mother looked after her children before and after school, allowing her to continue to teach. Having put her own active involvement with the NUT on hold, in favour of supporting her husband in his teaching career, Carol's NUT activism remained dormant for many years. Once she had relinquished her 'duty' to childcare, she became more involved in her work for the NUT and took up a position on the General Teaching Council (GTC), representing the NUT, which she did for 4 years. This experience fuelled her desire to become more involved

with the political aspects of the NUT until, despite not being a member of the national executive, she was democratically elected national president. Although retired from teaching, Carol continues to encourage new and early career teachers, especially women, to become active in the union.

#### **7.1.9 JULIE**

Julie became a teacher after having had a successful career in an unrelated industry. She believed that she could make a difference to society, to make it a better place, but she did not feel adequately prepared or confident enough to go into teaching until she was in her 30s, because she did not have enough life experience which she believed the career of teaching warranted. Julie is a highly committed member of the NUT, both locally and nationally. She is a regular speaker at the annual conference and encourages colleagues to stand up for their rights, particularly in relation to supply teachers. She is a staunch campaigner for the Anti Academies Alliance (AAA) and is also involved in anti-racism issues. She is particularly interested in bringing media attention to account and has taken it upon herself to monitor and share with colleagues the media links regarding education, government policy changes and the impact that these policies have on teachers and children.

#### **7.1.10 DEBBIE**

Although Debbie had been encouraged to become involved in NUT work at many levels, initially it was not always easy being a young woman teacher with a baby. Supported by her husband and her local association, she became involved with NUT work at national level, which presented problems such as juggling her teaching job, childcare and sharing the running of a home as well. Debbie continued to question the fairness of some of the systems in the NUT whereby women with children were not being considered for roles because they could not attend certain events due to maternity and childcare issues. She noticed that the men who did not have such responsibilities were being given more opportunities and she brought her concerns to the attention of the former NUT general secretary, Steve Sinnott, who took steps to change procedures in the light of Debbie's observations. Having been nominated as assistant divisional secretary by her local association, Debbie was supported to ultimately become divisional secretary. She continued in this role, taking on case work and was democratically elected to the NUT national executive. Debbie has three children, works as a teacher, speaks regularly at annual conference and is supported by her husband and local association in doing so. She

is an advocate for women teachers' rights and actively supports other women to take on significant roles in the union. She is active on local, regional and national committees and has taken part in events to raise money for the Steve Sinnott Foundation, which was set up after his untimely death.

#### **7.1.11 BRENDA**

Brenda became a teacher having been a mature student. She was married with children before establishing her career, then divorced, which made it difficult, but not impossible, to retain a career and bring up her children. She continued her membership of the NUT and eventually became active in her local association. During the course of her teaching career, Brenda worked at a variety of schools, eventually becoming a head teacher. She did not defer to the NAHT but remained as a member of the NUT, actively taking on roles in her local association and regional council, and became an elected member of the national executive, ultimately becoming national president. Brenda has always upheld NUT values, supporting teachers and children in her school as head teacher, and encouraging women teachers to speak out against unfairness. She is particularly concerned with succession planning within the union and actively encourages young teachers to take on roles in the union at local, regional and national levels.

#### **Summary**

In spite of the variety of introductions to teaching and the NUT, all these participants are active NUT women teachers who believe that they can make a difference to education and the children they teach. Advocacy, agency and empowerment are focal issues for Jenny, Penny, Yasmin, Anna, Lisa, Maureen, Julie and Debbie. These women encourage other women teachers to speak out, to take professional ownership, and to take an active role in their own professional trajectories. They are also effective advocates for those women teachers who are unable to speak up for themselves. Rose and Brenda exhibit strong feelings regarding their roles in leadership positions, both as head teachers and in the leadership roles they hold in the NUT. For Carol and Debbie in particular, family influence and support have been important factors which enable them to continue their activism. There is a blurring of boundaries between their personal and professional work lives, as well as their NUT work lives where NUT structures and dilemmas mirror the workplace. The data in the following sections in this chapter indicate the themes which have emerged through their own words. Notions of 'fairness' for women in a variety of contexts comes through as a strong motivating factor for all the participants.

## **7.2 Perceptions of professionalism**

In this section, I present findings on the main emergent theme of Perceptions of Professionalism. The sub-sections indicate further themes which I have noted whilst scrutinising the data. The sub-sections describe how participants have dealt with the threat of the government neo-liberal policy agenda in the light of the emotional work that teaching entails. Perceptions of professionalism within the NUT are important factors which are discussed here, as is the issue of family life for the women teacher activists.

### **7.2.1 The threat of the neo-liberal agenda and the notion of emotional work**

The government's neo-liberal agenda has been a source of contention for teachers, resulting in a breakdown in the relationship between the profession and the government. Julie discusses the feelings she has with regards to the media and how teachers are portrayed, compromising their professional integrity, which she believes is a result of government mistrust.

*I think there's been a media campaign, kind of orchestrated by government to denigrate teachers and to denigrate the professionalism of teachers and I'm sort of starting to catalogue now the stories that are in the papers week in, week out about failing teachers, bad teachers, teachers that are to blame for children being starved to death. It feels like there isn't a news story where they can't just somehow shoehorn in teachers being to blame. I don't know who, I'm not saying that teachers are perfect. We are very representative of the population as a whole but nobody goes into teaching unless they want to do some good, and I don't know who all these bad teachers and failing teachers are. I certainly don't work with them. I work with a brilliant bunch of people who've just got the best interests of the kids at heart. So, yeah, I do feel as if there's been a campaign and what I seek to do is to try and mitigate that in some way. I think that when something is wrong you have to speak up and it maybe, it always gets drowned out, but if you don't try then you definitely won't get heard.*

Brenda describes her feelings about what she perceives as the erosion of professionalism by the government neo-liberal policy agenda and the media.

*I think there was a period when I wasn't, and like a lot of teachers, you didn't say you were a teacher if you could help it in a social situation, because you'd either get people telling you horror stories of their life at school or asking you about 'why*

*don't schools do this? Why don't they do that?' To then, we went through a period when I felt that teachers were respected and given a lot of, oh, what's the word? People I met would say, oh, gosh, I couldn't be a teacher. It's such a difficult job dealing with those children all day. And I think it coincides to some extent with whatever's going on in the media. So we've gone through a period where what was going on in schools was highlighted and maybe people would say, you know, teenagers, young children, there's no discipline, they don't behave. The teachers have got a hard job to teach anything while they try to keep discipline.*

*To now, I sense there's a shift. We're being expected to do everything, sort everything. Government lays blame at our door, consequently the general public, now, are looking to teachers to solve all ills and so perhaps we are not held in quite such high regard as we were for a period. So I've not much to base that on, except how I feel when you talk to people about being a teacher. It's not quite like the admiration that there used to be, and the respect. And I think the government have done a good job of painting us as incompetent, not professional, that you can hand teachers a manual and they should be able to do it and that, you know, I think it started with Chris Woodhead saying, you know, 10,000 teachers are incompetent, when actually it was the lessons that'd been judged as not good or outstanding by Ofsted when it first came in. So there's been a lot of, I suppose a smear campaign against teachers as a professional body. And it's all, I'm sure it's all part of a concentrated effort. It's not by accident but it's by design that the government want to downgrade teachers as professionals and make it a craft or technical skill that people can do by rote. You can be told what to do, do it, job done. And it doesn't require that high level of professionalism that I think myself and lots of teachers feel we have.*

Control of the education debate by the media and the potential of social media are explored by Julie. She cites the negativity against teachers as witnessed in the media versus the possibilities of teachers redressing the balance through social media.

*I think social media ... it's been a way of people who haven't had a voice up until now, and getting their voices heard and a way of, I feel that, I know that in the autumn [when strike action is currently scheduled to take place] we're going to come up in waves of negative, even if the media are going to ignore it, or they're going to, we'll have a wave of, 'lazy teachers. They just want a day off. They turn up*

*at 9 and they leave at 3 and they get long holidays. What's wrong with them? Just get on with it like the rest of us have to'. We're going to have a load of that.*

*What we didn't have before is not only, we had social media, but we've now got a cohort of tech-savvy young teachers that know how to use that to get their voice heard. So we've got a way of counteracting, to a certain extent, that negative press. And that makes me feel a lot more positive.*

In the light of the difficulties experienced by teachers to maintain a professional stance, Julie discusses how teaching is changing and how she believes that there is still a need for children to be taught to be critical thinkers. She advocates this way of teaching denying the government's stance, which is to enable children to pass standardised tests. It is here that the root of the breakdown between the profession and the government lies.

*I think my job as a teacher is not what to teach kids what to think but how to think. I get them constantly to question and to analyse and never to take anything for granted, and I constantly challenge them gently about, like the use of the word 'gay', and have discussions with them. I remember having a discussion with my Year 9 class when the student protests were happening and they said, 'can we go out and can we riot?' And I said, 'well, why would you go rioting? Tell me why', and they said, 'um, yeah, not sure about that'. So somebody said, 'why are the students protesting?' and we discussed it and I explained about how you didn't used to have to pay to go to university, and then you had to pay a little bit and then it was £9,000 a year and one of them said, 'don't they want us to go to university?' [pause] Now that's a very difficult question to answer. But I think to make kids think, and to answer their questions honestly, it's very, very important.*

*I think what the government would like is they've got people with enough education to be useful, to work in a call centre, but to accept that they have to put their hand up to go to the toilet if they work in that call centre, so enough education to be able to work a computer, to be able to be a cog in the machine, but not so much that they question the rules. But they're the best kind of workers. But that's not my job to produce them. My job is to produce critical thinkers.*

Penny discusses the implications of the professional integrity of teachers and their autonomy, maintaining that teachers are well placed to make decisions about the curriculum and the needs of the children they teach. There is a sense of the wider social role of teachers, indicating that their professionalism extends beyond the

boundaries of the classroom. There is also a sense of advocacy permeating throughout Penny's words.

*Personally, I am always trying to advocate a creative curriculum and, you know, Black history, anti-sexist initiatives, where we can have, I asked (local authority) about LGBT history month. We work in (local authority). My children have been to school here. Homophobia is quite rampant in schools. We are good in (local authority) about Black history month, we're brilliant, and I said to (local authority), 'well, let's do LGBT history month', and I've tried to introduce perhaps something new there, so yeah, wherever I can. And I personally do teach parents. I do family learning. I teach parents how to help their children and so, you can quite easily see what will help families, which is advice with money, advice on benefits, advice on housing, help with English, help with literacy. So really, you could say to the government, 'if you're really interested in children's progress, you would put money, and to give them credit, like the Labour party did, into Sure Start, into initiatives where families get help at the earliest point'. And I think, again, that's an area that the union should be putting more resources into, Early Years, Sure Start, those kind of initiatives make such a difference. I know, over my 13 years teaching, I've noticed that the behaviour of children, or the emotional problem of children has improved massively because they go to a Children's Centre when they're 1 and the process starts early in children in speech and language, all of those kinds of initiatives. I work next door to a Children's Centre. I work a lot with them, and there is a bit of a competitive edge now in schools. Our school has a nursery next door. We used to work a lot in collaboration, now I think we compete for children. And I try and do a lot of collaboration, I share courses with them, my management don't necessarily know about that (laughs), so just, all of these kinds of things trying to push out the things that we know make a difference. Not testing and boosters and all that kind of rubbish.*

Anna describes how a recent Ofsted inspection was essentially a data collection exercise – a narrow view of a specific section of teachers' work. She explains the dilemma of teaching what she and her staff believe in within a regime of strict accountability. Anna's words highlight other examples from the women teachers which show the chasm between the government's and teachers' perceptions of professionalism.

*Well, I think we ticked a lot of boxes. They didn't look at us so much for achievement, although our kids do achieve very well in it, especially kids who have*



*previously not achieved well. But we tick very well on things like the whole spiritual, moral, cultural and so on, and the wellbeing of the children, the leadership, the management, all that kind of thing. They didn't see any teaching but they saw the evidence of the work so they made an assumption that the attainment is good, and so on. So, yeah, we've been quite smart. We've tried to do what we want to do. We've also been aware of the wolf at the door... It is possible, and it's hard, but there's a bit of luck as well. I mean, I'm lucky where I am and these things all come together, don't they, but we've made the most of the conditions we're in.*

Penny discusses the Finnish model of education as a possible alternative to the neo-liberal agenda which she believes would improve the lives of teachers and children profoundly.

*I always talk about Finland and countries which I contrast with the countries that Gove wants to compare us to, like Singapore, and look at a country where teacher professionalism is absolutely revered and teachers are treated like gold dust, there's a very low turnover rate, there's no inspection, no Ofsted. No one would dream of coming into your classroom and telling you what to do. And that has a knock-on effect. You have such confidence. You're held in such high esteem, that I just think that makes you turn into a dedicated and professional teacher. The opposite happens here. You always feel you're doing it wrong, you always feel someone could do it better. All you think about is what you're doing wrong, and if someone came in, what would they notice that you weren't doing right. That is, kind of, the ethos that we have and, as well as teaching, I get lots of phone calls from people who are always being criticised and lose their confidence.*

*So professionalism, I often use that word and I often talk about Finland cos I say, 'there is another model'. There's no point saying how bad everything is. You have to say, 'well, I'll show you where it could be like', in the era now, not in a Socialist Utopia, but in a country like ours, with the same problems, same issues. And, you know, it's easy to see how life could be so much better.*

Brenda describes how she feels about government policy changes and how they affect her own sense of professionalism. It is not just the weight and rapidity change, but the lack of autonomy which is evident here. Instead of being able to use her own experience and professional judgement, she is subject to being told what to do by the government and how to do it. The policy changes affect every level of the education system albeit inconsistently, depending on which government is in power.

*Every time the government comes out with an announcement, you don't know whether it's going to affect you. You know, one of the things I've noticed in the past years, I suppose it's with the change of government, the things that we were doing suddenly stopped. Suddenly they weren't important and you think of the hours that you've wasted. Things like Curriculum Review. We were all geared up with a new curriculum, trying to put it into place, planning ahead, when we would look at it and it didn't happen. It's still not happening so we're in a bit of a vacuum there.*

*Changes to Early Years, again, you know, every time there's a new government, there's new initiatives. Every Child Matters was one of the better initiatives and now it's as if children don't matter at all. It's about data and what the government want. Accountability, on a narrow range of data as well. So government policy has a big impact. The policy is getting more and more dictated into minutiae. The day to day running of the school is dictated by government whereas they don't set broad parameters anymore. It's much more what they say, their returns, what they want, much more so.*

Julie discusses how privatisation has the potential to control our education system. There is a fear that business models for making profit will overtake notions of teacher professionalism and good teaching.

*I think that, especially with the advent of a global economic downturn, the people at the top have realised that there are certain things that always have to happen. People will always be born, and they will always need to go to school, they will always get sick, they will always get old and need care, they will always die and need burying or cremating, and if you can privatise those areas, there's a guaranteed income stream, and I think there's a particularly big guaranteed income stream in education, cos kids go to school for a minimum of, how many years? I can't work it out off the top of my head, but it's a lot, a big chunk of time. You've got a guaranteed income stream, not just for a period of time whilst they're sick but for years whilst they're at school. But to make it a really effective business model, you need to cut your costs and your biggest cost is staffing. So you need to break nationally agreed conditions. I feel like what they're doing is preparing us for a profit-making model.*

Penny discusses government control, particularly in the light of the government's neo-liberal education reform agenda and the ensuing changes. Comparing this to previous quotations, her perspective is different in its perception of the breakdown

of the relationship between the profession and the government. The perceptions here relate to historic roots and blame.

*I think this government (Coalition) has made a big difference. I mean, I'm also very critical of the Labour party and we were involved in Anti-Academies Alliance when Labour brought academies in and often you can say that most of the things the Tories are bringing in, Labour thought of or introduced. So you do blame them, so the pace of the attacks is unbelievable. Every day you hear on the radio that Gove is cutting our holidays, he's cutting pay, he's, every day you can hardly keep up... I think it's a political attack and I think it's because teachers are strongly involved in trade union politics, so we have national pay bargaining, or we did have until recently. And we are able to have decent, not brilliant, decent pay and decent pensions cos we've got a strong tradition of trade union members. I think he wanted to crack that, and I don't think we are actually the miners of the Thatcher generation, but we are certainly, there isn't another profession that's had it so relentless from the government.*

A particular fear that is cited in the data is that unqualified people will take away teachers' work. Jenny exemplifies the perception of the de-professionalisation of teaching.

*I think Teaching Assistants should assist teachers, but I know none in our school, cos we don't allow it, but at my local school, where I live ... their Teaching Assistants cover classes. I won't say the word 'teach' because they're not teachers. They cover classes and I think it's despicable because there are so many supply teachers who are looking for jobs ... You wouldn't ask a nurse to go and perform surgery, so why do you do it in a classroom? So it devalues us as a profession. But I think they've got a vital role. When I went into my school, there were two and they used to wipe noses and just wash knees and now it's more professional. They've got a much more highly skilled job, but I do think that the lines are blurred between teachers and teaching assistants in schools and I want a demarcated role where they don't go into the teaching role, that they're there to assist teachers, and I think that the line is blurred, especially with PPA coverage. We're lucky. We've had teachers do all of ours. We're a very unionised school. But I think it's just come from, when I went, it was very, every other school in the area, but we have got a reputation for being a bit of a trailblazer for a primary school, which is good. [Name of an executive officer] always says that. But we've had to fight all the way along*

*because our head teacher, although he was a great guy, he was a little bit anti NUT and everything was a fight.*

The emotional work of teaching is a particular concern and an often overlooked entity by governments. The government requirements of high stakes testing and accountability have challenged many teachers in their work regarding their profession integrity and ethos of education. The negative emotions resulting from this type of accountability have been documented in the literature chapters of my thesis and have been cited in the women teachers' narratives. The data show that some teachers have tried to implement their own educational philosophy, which may not be in line with the testing regime, with varying rates of success.

Whilst teaching in a school in a deprived, inner city area, Jenny was the victim of long-term absence due to work-related stress. The emotional work of teaching is evident in her words, exemplifying the guilt felt by teachers when faced with the emotional work of teaching which has driven them to long-term absence due to work-related stress. Teachers such as Jenny want to teach and facilitate teaching and learning to be a pleasurable experience, yet the stresses of high stakes testing and accountability appear to conspire to stop this from happening. There is also a sense of frustration and humiliation to be detected in her words.

*I was actually off with stress for about 5 and a half months. It was class-related. We had a terrible class and I was a Year 5 teacher at the time and I fell for the fact, you know when you say, 'I'm stressed', I didn't know what it was like to have real stress until that period. And I've not ever had it since, or before that. I took 5 months off work. The class were just unteachable. I think they had, in the 5 months that I was off, they had 32 supply teachers. And I received a lovely letter from a gentleman who'd worked at the school years before and he'd lasted about 8 working days with them. He wrote me a little letter and he said, 'to the lady who has taken this class from September to February, I take my hat off to you. You're a better teacher than I'. And it was in the drawer when I came back. And I was very worried about coming back, and when I read it, it was like, it got me over it. I just thought, 'well he's had 35 years teaching experience', so I didn't feel as though it was anything to do with me. I think it was more to do with the class. I think any teacher would have felt the same.*

The emotional work involved in teaching can not only take its toll on the teacher involved, but also on the activist teacher who empathises with stressed colleagues, as Julie explains here.

*I feel torn a lot of the time because I'm not as optimistic as [colleague's name] naturally is. It quite exhausts me and I find it very, incredibly stressful. I feel stressed on behalf of the kids, that we're doing this thing through to an unpredictable future, and I feel very stressed on behalf of colleagues that I see, sort of falling by the wayside. But, as [colleague's name] says, the answer is to, well, lie in a corner and weep or get active. And it feels much better to be active.*

*I don't think teachers as a whole are a fighting bunch. We don't look for fights, but I think that Michael Gove has refused to negotiate and that this autumn, it's kind of, it's not make or break, but it's very important point in the battle for education. I feel like we're having a battle for education so I'm just trying to polish up my armour and get myself ready.*

In spite of Julie's concerns that the government's challenges to teacher professionalism are causing emotional damage to teachers, there is a strong sense of resilience through collective agency as she speaks.

*I'm finding that people get worn down, and they either collapse or they reach a point where they say, 'actually, d'you know what, we're going to fight back'. I feel that a lot of people have reached that point. I'm getting teachers who are not political at all saying. 'I've had enough of this; this is ridiculous. This isn't what, you know, why I wanted to become a teacher. This isn't the education I want to be giving children. It isn't the future I want to be giving kids', and it's kind of now or never. So I feel that this autumn is an incredibly important point in the battle for education.*

Jenny describes some of the ramifications surrounding an Ofsted inspection, exemplifying the emotional nature of teachers' work.

*We've just had the worst Ofsted we've had in 22 years. The worst one. We've got a notice to improve which is not unsatisfactory. It's not the old unsatisfactory, it's the old satisfactory, so we've got a year to pull our socks up. But it's really hard because we've got all of this and it's very unsettled, you know, with the management... I've got colleagues who, I think they could be on the radar, could be forced out of the job, because they're not classed as good teachers and the local authority want us to be all good. That's quite stressful for me, because I'm the first point of call. So there's been quite a few tears... we're supposed to be the old outstanding or something. They want us to do planning proformas for maths and English and guided reading and to come into your classroom. They've got this*

*recipe of what a good teacher is. It's just, we're all different. Children coming through our school, when they come into my class, they got really good science teaching and maths teaching cos that's what I love. And they got, you know, adequate or good teaching in the other subjects. There seems to be this, like, you have to be really, really good, especially with maths and English, and people where it's not their strength are just being made to feel as though they're failures. So there has been a lot of, we've got a couple of teachers who've been, they've come forward for case reviews with the NUT. So it's difficult. [They're feeling] demoralised really. So that's hard. So there's been a lot going on in school. We went through a phase where there just didn't seem to be anything. Even when I'd go along to the NUT, there was never anything to do with our school. Now it just seems to be all about our school. We're a vulnerable school because of the leadership and because all of our teaching isn't good. I don't know how you do it. I don't know how you change teachers who've been in the school for a long time and Ofsted have come in and never said they're inadequate. We've not ever been a Special Measures school. It's ridiculous.*

Julie describes how she perceives the consequences the recent rapid government policy changes have impacted on teachers' emotional health and wellbeing.

*I'm seeing teachers demoralised like never before. People really have fallen to their knees and that has a knock-on impact on the children as well. They sense that they are being taught by people who are really stressed. I remember, you know, we were expecting Ofsted in my school for about 9 months, actually that's not quite true, it was about 6 months, and I remember one of the kids saying to me, 'I don't think we should have Ofsted', and I said, 'why?' 'cos it makes people so stressed'. Yeah (laughs) it does. It really does... He was, I think he was 11 or 12. So, yeah, I'm really seeing an impact on people. I'm seeing people leaving. Really good teachers leaving. I can think of [teacher's name], who's a young, we don't have many male primary school teachers. There's a young male primary school teacher. We need more of them. He's had enough after 2 years of teaching. And it's become a topic of conversation in the playground, 'what are you going to re-train as?' 'Well I'm thinking about, what are you going to?' (laughs). 'I'm just thinking about the mortgage, but I can't keep going'. '2 years max. 2 years max'. Some people are going, 'Christmas, Christmas', (laughs). But, you know, it's never been like that before. I've only been teaching for 10 years and the last 2 years has been really grim... It's relentless. It feels relentless [referring to inspection and accountability].*

Taking up the theme of children's results, Jenny questions the wisdom of attainment tables.

*You know, I'll just quote these, because I thought these were very good. 2 years ago we got 93% or above in maths and 85 for English, which I think, for the area, is excellent. Last year, we got 73 and we have been hit over the head about that. But it's a different cohort of children. It's a one form entry. There were 7 children with Special Needs out of the 1 class and there were (?), so there was a quarter of the children with Special Needs. So straight away you lose 25%. You can't get those children to, so while they don't make progress, I don't mind. When children come in you want to see progress. But the attainment, I can't stand that they publish attainment tables, because every cohort of children in one school are different, so you can't compare. The 2 teachers that did those results were the same ones that done them the year before, so why do these people say, 'they dropped by 20%'. No they haven't dropped. And that annoys me... Measuring against another. I mean, you can't do that so I don't like it. That's why I don't like attainment tables. I don't mind progress tables, because whatever they get at Key Stage 1, you want there to be progress, as a parent and a teacher. That's different. But not attainment. And that really annoys me.*

Looking back over her teaching career of more than 20 years, Jenny discusses how she believes that although the children she teaches now have a better environment and better resources than before, teachers' circumstances have changed for the worse. She explores the impact of high stakes testing and accountability within the context of emotional work.

*Just an erosion of everything ... the children I teach now have got so much more. So from the pupils' point of view, I think they've got a fantastic amount but I don't think teachers have. And when I look back, I think it was more of the pressures. It's the pressures of results, performance management, workload is just unbelievable. Phenomenal now. I'm more tired than I've ever been and sometimes I do feel, and I'm quite a strong person, I do feel like I'm just getting by, by the skin of my teeth. I'm a Year 6 teacher so I've got the SATs to worry about, and I have got those other roles now through the union. So that's an added extra, cos you are going to all these things but I do love it, so it's a comfort to me more than a chore. But the role has, and sometimes I can't see a way out. I can just see it getting worse before it gets better.*

*I think as far as the children are concerned, as I said before, I think it's fantastic. The schools are better. They've got a broader curriculum, but I think the stresses on a teacher are going to directly affect all that good with the pupils because of this, the whole guff about the maths and English. The teachers, we don't do it in our school, but I do know of teachers who suspend the curriculum from January, and it's all about results, results, results. Well that must be having an effect on those children. I would hate to have my child in a school with a diet of that to jump through the Level 4 hoop. We don't do that. Maybe that's why we're in this position, where Ofsted don't think we're a great performing school. Cos we don't do that. Cos we care about the children. We're a Catholic school and we care about the children. So that worries me, and I'm thinking, even though I think it's much better for children, I know there's more exams and that's awful, for secondary school children, but for primary school children I think it's a lot better, besides the level on phonics. I don't agree with all that. The level that they're labelled at, I don't like that bit. But for what they get, I can just compare it, as I said, to the baseline 20 years ago and it's wonderful.*

*I'm in a school where I can have, if there's one thing I need, the money's there to get it. There was nothing. We just had enough for pencils and a few books. 22 years ago and there was paper here and everywhere, whereas now it's lovely and the school looks beautiful, and that's only better for the children. I think it's [teachers' workload] unmanageable. I really do. And I think you're going to see more and more teachers on capability procedures. But when all of these teachers go off on capability, I don't know who's going to be there. Even new teachers coming into the profession, they're no better than the older teachers who are there and they're going to be the same, cos it is unmanageable.*

As head of a drama department, Anna has to identify good teaching. Here she discusses the dilemmas she has to face as an NUT activist and a teacher in a position of authority within the school. Her particular approach as an individual vested with some responsibility in the process of high stakes accountability is apparent as she tries to make the procedure more palatable and less stressful and emotional.

*Because what happens is that, because I'm in and out of the lessons, senior management would like to say it's a learning walk. Now it kind of is, but the reason that it's not possible is that I don't go in and out of those lessons looking to cause trouble. I do observe things and I do think, I'm going to have to have a word about*



*that, but then I'm able to find a way of raising it that isn't personal, that isn't vindictive, that isn't going to affect their pay, that actually becomes part of a wider discussion about what we're doing and why we're doing it... So I very rarely do formal lesson observations cos I don't need to do formal lesson observations. Being a good union person, I make sure that nobody has more than 3 ... so senior management say, 'oh, you do learning walks and learning competencies' and I say, 'that's fine, but learning competence is different. I mean, you know, but you're talking about doing learning walks, you're talking about doing learning competencies, you're going in with a clipboard.' But that, in my world, that would be a much better way of running an evaluation system where, within a department, people are peer, genuinely peer observing, and then discussing on, not against the good mark or the outstanding mark, but just, 'you know when you did that, what was your thinking behind that?' or 'I liked the way that happened. How did you do that?' or something. Because people want to do well, don't they? They want to deliver, so that's very healthy.*

The breakdown of the relationship between the profession and the government is a direct result of the introduction of the government's neo-liberal education agenda. The root of the breakdown between the profession and the government lies in the fact that teachers believe that children should be taught to be critical thinkers. Teachers believe that this runs contrary to the government's notion of education in so far as children should be enabled to pass standardised tests. Teachers' professional integrity and autonomy should be adhered to as they are well placed to make decisions on how to educate children. Strict accountability measures and high stakes testing are highlighted issues which show the chasm between the differing perceptions of professionalism advocated by the profession and the government.

Negative connotations concerning teachers, substantially from the media, have contributed to the notion that teacher professionalism is gradually being eroded. There are fears that the media is in control of the education debate, however, there is also hope that the use of social media by a new generation of 'tech savvy' teachers will alleviate these fears. As an alternative to the neo-liberal agenda, the Finnish model is advocated.

The weight and rapidity of government policy changes affect teachers' sense of professionalism. The lack of autonomy, the devaluation of their experience and professional judgement, being told what to do and how to do it have affected every level of the education system albeit inconsistently. The privatisation of education

has the potential to take control, exacerbating a fear that business models for making profit will overtake notions of teacher professionalism and good teaching. The introduction of unqualified people taking over teachers' work is putting teachers' professional identity at risk. Teachers perceive their professional identity to be under threat, putting further strain upon their emotional investment. Yet in spite of such challenges, teachers try to maintain a wider sense of social responsibility which extends beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

The emotional work of teaching is a particular concern and is often overlooked by governments. The government requirements of high stakes testing and accountability have challenged many teachers in their work regarding their professional integrity and ethos of education. The negative emotions due to the high level accountability regime have resulted in some teachers implementing their own educational philosophy. Some teachers have become victims of long-term absence due to work-related stress, conveying a sense of guilt, frustration and humiliation in doing so. In spite of the emotional damage caused by the government's challenges to teacher professionalism, there is a strong sense of resilience through collective agency. Teacher activists continue to empathise with colleagues who are experiencing emotional damage. When possible, colleagues who are vested with some responsibility in the process of high stakes accountability will try to make the procedure more palatable and emotionally debilitating.

The women teachers' concern for their colleagues is evident in the data. They are aware that colleagues are going through difficulties and need support to stand up for what they believe to be right. The women are not afraid to volunteer for activist roles and, in spite of the challenges they may face, show resilience and qualities of leadership. It is through what they perceive as the unfair treatment of colleagues that their activism is shaped.

### **7.2.2 Perceptions of professionalism within the NUT**

In spite of the NUT being an organisation which is meant to enable teachers to become active and fight against the neo-liberal government agenda, tensions remain at the heart of some debates. There is an impression of shaping the NUT through a sense of professionalism. Teachers' perceptions of the role of an activist appear to be shaping a movement. Leadership and resilience are hallmarks of the data. The women teachers are taking their sense of professionalism into the NUT arena and shaping it from below.

As an activist, Debbie had issues which were in conflict with her roles as a teacher and a mother. She describes how this was played out as she tried to remain true to her sense of professionalism as a teacher, yet challenge the authority of the NUT leadership.

*...when you're in the NUT, there aren't very many people that were, at that time, my age and a woman, so they ask you to sit on various committees, so I was on gender advisory committee. I did a couple of other national committees which was really exciting. And then I fell pregnant with my oldest and decided I was going to go back part-time after I had him. So I went on maternity leave, had him in the Easter, then went back in the summer term because, 9 weeks old, I think he was. In those times you could just work, I think I had to work 6 weeks and get 6 months money, and then I could go back and I went back part-time after that. I remember starting to do the job, doing the work for 2 days a week, and I turned around and said, 'well, hold on a minute. You pay me 1 day facilities allowance for full-time and now I'm part-time I'm not getting anything. I'm doing it on my own', then that's when they agreed with the school they'd pay me for 3 days and release me from school for a day so I did 2 days in school and one day for the NUT.*

Jenny explains how her NUT activism was exacerbated due to tensions amongst the staff in her school. There being no effective union representation, she decided to take on the role to engage her own sense of teacher professionalism with her strong sense of fairness.

*Well, what it was, we had an NUT rep in school. She was an NUT rep where all mail went in her shopping bag. We had no NUT notice board. We didn't ever get photocopies of any of the mail and, I think people knew because I was quite, you know, I would stand up to the boss if there was anything that we needed, you know, like the temperature dropped or something, say, well you know, you have to be. So I think people saw me as I having gone into the role unofficially, and I just sat the rep down and I just said, '9 members of staff had approached me and they weren't getting the mail. I was just wondering if you'd like me to take over the role'. She just pulled a file out, plonked it on the table, slapped it down, and that was the beginning of me to be, I was the rep then. So it was shortly after the crib incident that that happened. So I was the rep. Then I had the NUT come in and that's, as I said, that's how I got involved, so yeah.*

Penny discusses her views on how the NUT is fighting for teachers and in doing so, taking the lead to fight against government challenges.

*I think, it's easy to criticise the union, but if you look across all the trade unions, I think I'm proud of the NUT for being the ones leading the way in the demonstrations and the strikes. We're about to take strike action, starting in September, and we're doing it out there on our own, which I think is pretty admirable, so, we can always criticise tactics and what we should be doing, and I think that's our job, isn't it, to push the NUT and say, 'you should do x,y and z'. But I think, credit where it's due, they are leading the fight against this government and it's taken other trade unions to join in.*

Penny explores the wider remit of the trade union movement, demonstrating the strength of feeling she has in relation to her expectations of it in terms of the locus of the NUT.

*I think the trade union movement has kind of got a lot to answer for, because I think, we had a fantastic strike in November 2011. 30 trade unions. The public sector seemed to be really fighting back, and I think we could have beaten the government on everything, on pensions. When Francis O'Grady gets up to speak on behalf of the TUC, I go, 'well, d'you know what, I blame you for the fact that I've got to work till I'm 67, because you are part of the machine that pulled it all out'. When we were winning, we did everything on the ground. I did more meetings in more schools. I visited 50 schools in (local authority)... And I talked about pensions and I personally kind of went to convince people, this is what they're taking from us. I think we'd convinced everyone of the arguments. People were willing to take action. We all went out, and then the trade union leaders backed off. I don't see why they backed off. We were winning. You know Gove is your enemy and you expect him to be your enemy, but some of the trade union leaders really did not do us any favours so I think, when we take another brave stance in the autumn, the other trade union leaders need to get out and, talking about gender, the stale, male and pale cliché has been turned on its head through the last 3 or 4 years when there's been women leading the strikes taking demonstrations through (local area). It's been fantastic to see young women who've never been on demonstrations before, taking a lead, taking the megaphone, and you almost got a glimpse of how we could not only change, stop what's going on in our schools, but a kind of different society. And I just hope that spirit comes back.*

Anna discusses how she believes that being active in the NUT is strongly integrated with good teaching and learning. These elements are 'connected', allowing her to

'stay as a teacher'. There is also a feeling of survival and resilience. A strong sense that the NUT is being shaped through a sense of professionalism is also present.

*In my school [there] is a very strong union group. It was strong when I got there, had a good rep. It got stronger under me, because we increased membership and we're almost entirely NUT membership now. And I genuinely feel now, the way you've got strong membership and activity, and a union group that is engaged with questions at a political level somehow, I think the teaching and learning is a better experience. So to me, the two go hand in hand, and I don't understand why there's this antagonism towards trade union activity, cos I think it creates a culture where good learning can take place. So I would say we've been quite successful.*

*You know that's the other thing I would say, my union work has made it possible for me to stay as a teacher, because people who aren't political in my school do get demoralised and do feel, 'oh, what's it all for?' and because my teaching is placed within a wider political consciousness, it's made it, even when I've really just thought I can't do this anymore and I just feel really low, I've always been conscious of the bigger question about, you know, I feel that the government would like it if we all left, because they can just farm the jobs out to Teach First, and it's just changed and I think that would be wrong, so I kind of see it as an act of resistance to stay, you know, and to just be a thorn because I feel that if we can hold out long enough, change might come, sort of thing. So actually, again it's not something that I see separate to what I do in the classroom. I see it as very connected.*

Anna explains how trade union activity is necessary to protect teachers from excessive workload. The overriding theme here is that of professional ownership.

*We don't have more than one [staff] meeting a week. We're really strict about that. We go to the briefing out of courtesy, what's the word? Voluntarily. But if they ever get funny about anybody not going to briefing, we say we don't have to go to briefing. So we're very strict about that. And because people feel they have some level of protection, I think, you know, I mean, people work so hard in my school. It's not a school where people, it sounds like I'm saying people are work shy. It's not. People, you know, I don't work as hard as some people in my school. There are people there from 7 o'clock in the morning till 6 o'clock at night but they, probably more than a lot of schools, are determining what they are doing to some extent, so all that time is not taken up with routines. If they choose to meet and plan together, that's because they've identified, so that's what they need. The workload is still*

*horrendous, taking on so much marking. This whole APP, this levelling, is a nightmare in our school as well. It's everywhere. We're not free from it. But I would say that the trade union activity in our school has made a certain level of professional ownership possible in a way that I think it wouldn't be possible in some schools that don't have that strong trade union activity.*

Making links between male and female teachers and their traditional roles, Julie talks about primary and Early Years education with specific reference to the tensions in leadership roles within the NUT. It is evident that her own perception of professionalism is not yet reflected in the current remit of the Union.

*It's certainly a blind spot in the union. The union is, the membership is, what? Is it 75% women? And then, that's the reverse when you get into the top of the leadership, and the men are, tend to be, secondary backgrounds, so Early Years and primary education is a definite blind spot in the union. And [names two activists] have done absolutely masses to highlight that and make the union focus on it... I'd describe myself as a critical friend. I always want more. But I'm proud to be in the NUT.*

Jenny explains her experiences of conflict in her local association committee when there is a clash with her sense of professionalism.

*... there was one small point where I did leave the union. When I say 'leave the union', I still carried on paying my subs but I just came off the committee for about a year and a half. I think that was more to do with what was going on on the committee. It started to become a little bit, I just couldn't see it going anywhere. There were quite a number of people on the committee who were just there to cause trouble and I just thought I'd had enough. And I came back. I thought I just needed a bit of a sabbatical, I think. And then came back fighting.*

NUT members sometimes question the NUT directives, as Jenny explains, which can cause tensions for her as a rep.

*...when we went on strike, some of the teachers from (?) say, 'oh, you know, we've lost 3 days' pay now and nothing's come of it. D'you honestly think this is gonna change it?' And I say, 'but even if it doesn't, it stops further erosion'. I look at it as, go on strike, lose the pay, because if you don't, they'll take even more away from you. So that's the mantra that I give out to the teachers in school, and they're pretty good. We've got a really good unionised school.*

Teachers' perceptions of the role of an activist appear to be instrumental in shaping the NUT. Teachers are also shaping the movement through their own sense of professionalism. Professional ownership, 'connectedness', survival, resilience and leadership are strong themes. The women are well able to stand up for themselves and speak out when they believe that something is unfair, whether defending NUT policy or actually questioning it. It is because they question rather than accept NUT policy that the NUT could evolve as a stronger force. Despite challenges, the women are proud to be part of the NUT. When challenging the authority of the NUT, there is a sense of teacher professionalism which constantly remains. This sense of professionalism is also evident when trade unionism itself is challenged; yet it is hoped that young women trade unionists will continue to uphold the values of empowerment, advocacy and agency in the future.

There is evidence to suggest that the NUT itself causes barriers to women teachers becoming activists because of the disproportionate numbers of men taking control of senior positions. Certain sections of education are a 'blind spot' to the NUT because they are dominated by a female workforce which is not sufficiently represented. However, these women teachers are proud to be NUT activists, allowing for critique to drive a constant state of 'becoming' within the organisation, and transformational change to allow the NUT to grow and develop according to the needs of its members, particularly related to a strong sense of professionalism. Perceptions of conflict with the NUT often arise due to the women's sense of professionalism not being reflected in NUT leadership.

The emotional labour that exists for an NUT activist correlates to the emotional labour that takes place in the classroom, therefore the hierarchical tiers that exist at local, regional and national levels of the NUT can be compared to management tiers in schools. NUT activists may also experience feelings of vulnerability, stress and burnout. In this case, transformational change is required on every level to support teacher activists to re-establish their sense of dignity and authenticity to enable a positive sense of self and professional identity.

### **7.2.3 Family life: retaining teacher professionalism**

Although family influences are discussed in the later section on identity, some of the challenges presented in the data show how the women teachers have to struggle with circumstances rather than become identified by them. There is a strong sense of a need for an effective work-life balance and the struggle to achieve it. The narratives of two of the participant women teachers establishing their professional lives makes for a strong context in this section.

Jenny describes the dilemmas she faced whilst training to teach. In spite of her being a lone parent, she was determined to qualify as a teacher. She was grateful for her child's free nursery place and the sporadic help she received from her mother. Although she had to navigate the issues of childcare and experienced little social life, she still describes herself as being 'lucky'. There is a sense that, particularly as a young woman, the sacrifice she made regarding her social life appears to be one of the few elements of life that were within her control.

*Not having somebody to mind your children in the holidays ... I was also a one parent at the time. I was divorced so I was on my own. I was looking after my child on my own, and I did have family to help, but you can't rely on them for 6 weeks in the summer, you know. He was an only child, obviously, so, you know, it was purely... I was really lucky, because I was at [university] and they had nursery education and it was free. So it was actually better than being in the workplace because I didn't have to worry about a nursery place and I was just really lucky that I had my mum, so she picked him up for me when I needed her to and I had him in the holidays, so it fitted in quite well... I didn't have much of a social life. I was only 20 at the time so I had to make sacrifices with that.*

Again, Jenny describes herself here as 'lucky'. She recognises that, in the absence of the need to look after her children, she has more time to work as a teacher and work for the NUT. She expects domestic work to be shared with her husband. Reflecting upon her current circumstances, she empathises with those NUT members who have family commitments which she knows can cause conflict with their union roles. She is also aware that integrating the work of a teacher with the work entailed in looking after a family leaves little time for activism. It is obvious that she is aware as to how 'hard' it can be and understands the struggles of many women having experienced similar struggles herself.

*I'm quite lucky because I've got my second, I've married again and I've got my second husband and he is so domesticated, so I've not got, I don't think I've got as many of the concerns that other people have got. I haven't got to get home and put a meal on the table. I've got an equal relationship at home, so I've always been able to follow, go to meetings, and not have to say, 'oh, [husband's name], is it ok if I go to that meeting? I'll be out that night'. I've just gone along and done it. But it is a struggle at that point.*

*It's a bit easier for me now because my 2<sup>nd</sup> son has just gone off to university, so I've got a lot more time. I used to feel a lot more stressed when I'd have to go*



*home and cook tea or do different things. My husband works shifts, so we're really lucky. We do 50% each. So I haven't got that same, of having children to go home to. And I'll see some of my colleagues, I mean, if I say there's a general meeting, and I can see, it must be hard. You've got small children, you're on tea making duty or your husband might not be there or whatever, so I don't strong arm them too much, because I've been there and it's hard.*

Debbie, married with three primary school aged children, discusses how she tries to juggle her teaching job, her family commitments and the NUT roles she carries out. The thread of professionalism runs through Debbie's narrative, both as a teacher and as an activist. Relationships are important to her, especially those which include her husband and children. However, she receives mixed messages from her family who, on the one hand indicate a pride in her achievements, but on the other hand also miss her when her attention is focused on her NUT work and she is away from home. She explains how she 'micro-manages' domestic issues when she is away. There is a sense of guilt as she makes sacrifices to enable a caring and nurturing relationship with her family while her time is taken up with NUT work.

I asked her if she felt that the NUT had been supportive.

*They have, but obviously family wouldn't see it that way. It's always, you know, very much, you know. Most women talk about things, relationships more than men do. My husband was recently, was made redundant and he's now in a new job and he's now getting how I love my job, whereas he'd been in his previous job for 10 years and hated it, and was very much like, 'oh, the union is this, the union is that', but actually, on the other hand saying, 'we're very proud of you'. My [children] and it's just what mum does. And they're no different to, 'that's just how she is'.*

*I think the juggling is huge. I mean, I write lists like they're coming out of my ears and get in the habit of micromanaging when I'm away from home on executive cycle, and I phone at 7am. I phone my husband's mobile and it doesn't answer so I phone my eldest son... to make sure they're up, because the 1 day I didn't they were not late but only just on time for school. And I was like, 'that's all I do now'. It's pretty much easier to let go of the reins but, yeah.*

Transitioning is an important aspect of Debbie's narrative. Whilst she is becoming more used to travelling to NUT commitments and staying away from home, her children are growing up and also becoming used to her absence. As she maintains her professionalism as an activist, there is evidence of her being in regular phone

contact to communicate with her children. There is also a feeling of acceptance of the situation for both parties.

I enquired of Debbie, 'But even though you're away, you're still thinking about the family?' to which she made her reply.

*Always. Always. When I first used to go, and I don't do this anymore, I used to do spelling tests over the phone. I used to phone [son] cos he always had his spelling tests on a Friday. On a Thursday, sorry, and Wednesday was executive. So I'd phone on a Wednesday (pause as a trolley of crockery makes its way past) and do the spelling test over the phone. I'd have the list. He'd write them down and then he'd read them out. And then gradually, as the years have gone on, they don't have that need. They know I'm there. Plus my kids are older and they just Facetime you at some ridiculous hour, and you're like, 'OK'. And they'll phone for a chat. My older one now has just started secondary school. He goes home on his own but he'll phone you and have a conversation with you so it's been interesting, but you are constantly thinking about it and, erm, that you can't help, I don't think. And coming away, other executive members, for example, will be out on a Wednesday evening and I now don't phone home, because I used to phone at 6, which is when the meetings would finish, and that's chaos time. There's no point in phoning. Then I'd phone and the kids were still up, so I decided I didn't really want to have that conversation.*

Debbie explains that her children have the choice to communicate with her when she is away, which they do, rather than the onus being on her shoulders alone. There appears to be a balance regarding the initiation of communication, yet there is a perceived lack of understanding or empathy as to the amount of work in which Debbie is actually engaged.

*So now I just don't. I don't phone. I have no need to phone. If they need me they'll phone me and the kids know that. Or they'll text me or they'll Facetime me, or whatever. And if they've done something great at school then they'll phone up, so that's OK. But then you get to the conversations where, like they'll say, and I'll say, 'I'm shattered,' and they'll say, 'but you've only been to meetings', and I'll say, 'yeah, but I didn't get to bed, but I came last night. I'm here at [NUT training centre]'. And my husband is away but it wouldn't be different if he was at home.*

Debbie's social life is important to her, signifying her commitment to relationships outside her immediate family which are significant. Her professional approach to her

work is evident. In trying to achieve a successful work-life balance, she explains her priorities which are not linear but fitted in where she can manage. Self-care in the form of time allocated for sufficient sleep appears to be a sacrifice Debbie makes to be able to cope with all the facets of her life which are important to her.

*I went to bed at 3 o'clock in the morning, because you're sorting out uniform, because I'm away this week, then I'm home Friday, Saturday, then back Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday at various different committees, so I'd made sure there was enough, so the weekend I'm not doing it all, (?) for the whole of the time my end, I had union casework emails to answer, I had work to do.*

*Actually, d'you know why I went to bed late? Because actually, I hadn't seen my friends for about 2 months and we're a very close set of friends and they have a curry night once every half term on Friday, and I can't go, partly because I've been away and won't see the family, so I invited them round, knowing I would be away, so they can come round for tea and cake. I'm in the middle at 7 o'clock thinking, 'why did I bother asking them?' But, d'you know what, by half past 7 when we sat down, it was absolutely lovely. And that's partly why, because they went home at 11 and then you still continue to do all the jobs. But that's important, and even if you have to squeeze it in, so 3am, up at half past 6, 3 and half hours sleep.*

Organisational skills and the ability to adapt are important factors in Debbie's busy life. She explains that the care her children are given when she and her husband are both away is from a qualified professional, which shows how she values professionalism in others as well as herself. Her absence from the family home no longer presents feelings of guilt.

*But now I'm here, although I'm thinking about them, I no longer feel guilty, because I know that they're safe and I know that they're secure and, I mean, my husband's away working cos he's in his new job and we've got a fantastic babysitter who's actually a newly qualified teacher who has PPA on a Wednesday afternoon and her NQT time on a Thursday, so she has picked them up from wraparound, she's got them overnight at my house and she's taking them to wraparound in the morning and going. And I know I don't have to phone home cos they're perfectly safe. So I no longer feel guilty. So even though I've been up till 3am, tonight I will sleep. And then I will get up for a 9.45 meeting and get up and go to work. So I am getting better at that, but you are thinking, and I do all of a sudden, I'll go (gasps) 'disco ticket!' Because I hadn't done the disco ticket for [son] and I had to quickly phone the PTA and say, 'he's going to do this'. You have to be very organised but*

*you also have to be able to adapt massively to change instantly, and that's just how it is.*

Teacher professionalism is an important aspect of Debbie's activist work. She perceives the professionalism of both teaching and activism to be interlinked irrespective of the level of NUT activism. She discusses the difficulties that some women find in trying to fit as many aspects into their lives as she does, particularly citing the lived experiences of some women teachers who have no time to have a family. Debbie's perceptions of teaching, family life and activism may not, however, be as imperative to other women.

*I do feel I have my cake and eat it, because I have a family. They're a lot of women teachers who don't find time to have a family and do all of that. I have a family. I still get to be a teacher which I think is massively important if you're going to be on the executive. You still should be a teacher. I still get to be a teacher and I get to do the local person, secretary, and with all the strike action going on, I've had a lot of reps phoning me today, but equally, the national job. And it's just so exciting. And I do feel privileged that I can do it and know there aren't many women who can.*

In both narratives, the need for an effective work-life balance is evident, yet each narrative differs in its description of what this means. There is a sense of conflicted roles as a teacher, a mother and an activist. The traditional caring and nurturing roles that women are meant to take on are incorporated with their professional roles and their activist roles. There is also a sense of wanting to be a person – an individual in her own right; while Jenny talks about 'making sacrifices', and not being able to go out and meet friends because of other commitments, Debbie describes how she fits in her social life around her other commitments by sacrificing her time and going to bed late. Determination to accomplish professionalism is in evidence and sacrifices are made to achieve goals. In spite of a perceived lack of empathy from others regarding workload and the lack of self-care, these women teachers continue to pursue what matters to them.

The women teachers discuss the presence of other barriers to becoming trade union activists, including family expectations, particularly the responsibilities and restrictions imposed by families and their opinions. Similarly, cultural expectations of the role of women challenge re-constructed gendered discourses by confronting long-standing assumptions which are difficult to re-construct. An imposed or innate sense of duty to family, for example, can be used to engender feelings of guilt and disloyalty in abandoning

others for their own selfish pursuits. Overt actions such as marches or strike action compete with discursive practices which are at odds with each other.

## **Conclusions**

The breakdown of the relationship between the profession and the government is a direct result of the introduction of the government's neo-liberal education agenda. The root of the breakdown between the profession and the government lies in the fact that teachers believe that children should be taught to be critical thinkers. Teachers believe that this runs contrary to the government's notion of education in so far as children should be enabled to pass standardised tests. Teachers' professional integrity and autonomy should be adhered to as they are well placed to make decisions on how to educate children. Strict accountability measures and high stakes testing are highlighted issues which show the chasm between the differing perceptions of professionalism advocated by the profession and the government. The weight and rapidity of government policy changes affect teachers' sense of professionalism. The lack of autonomy, the devaluation of their experience and professional judgement, being told what to do and how to do it have affected every level of the education system albeit inconsistently.

Negative connotations concerning teachers, substantially from the media, have contributed to the notion that teacher professionalism is gradually being eroded. There are fears that the media is in control of the education debate, however, there is also hope that the use of social media by a new generation of 'tech savvy' teachers will alleviate these fears. The privatisation of education has the potential to take control, exacerbating a fear that business models for making profit will overtake notions of teacher professionalism and good teaching. The introduction of unqualified people taking over teachers' work is putting teachers' professional identity at risk. Teachers perceive their professional identity to be under threat, putting further strain upon their emotional investment. Yet in spite of such challenges, teachers try to maintain a wider sense of social responsibility which extends beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

The emotional work of teaching, which is a significant part of the professional landscape, is a particular concern and is often overlooked by governments. Negative emotions due to the high level accountability regime have resulted in some teachers implementing their own educational philosophy. Some teachers have become victims of long-term absence due to work-related stress, conveying a sense of guilt, frustration and humiliation in doing so. In spite of the emotional

damage caused by the government's challenges to teacher professionalism, there is a strong sense of resilience through collective agency. Teacher activists continue to empathise with colleagues who are experiencing emotional damage.

Teachers' professional perceptions of the role of an activist are instrumental in shaping the NUT. Professional ownership, 'connectedness', survival, resilience and leadership are strong themes. The women are well able to stand up for themselves and speak out when they believe that something is unfair, whether defending NUT policy or actually questioning it. In questioning policy, the NUT could evolve as a stronger force. Despite challenges, the women are proud to be part of the NUT. When challenging the authority of the NUT and trade unionism in general, there is a sense of teacher professionalism which constantly remains. Succession planning is raised in that young women trade unionists could continue to uphold the values of empowerment, advocacy and agency in the future.

Evidence suggests that the NUT itself causes barriers to women teachers becoming activists because of the disproportionate numbers of men taking control of senior positions. Certain sections of education are a 'blind spot' to the NUT because they are dominated by a female workforce which is not sufficiently represented. However, the women teachers are proud to be NUT activists, allowing for critique to drive a constant state of 'becoming' within the organisation, and transformational change to allow the NUT to grow and develop according to the needs of its members, particularly related to a strong sense of professionalism. Perceptions of conflict with the NUT often arise due to the women's sense of professionalism not being reflected in NUT leadership. The emotional labour that exists for an NUT activist correlates to the emotional labour that takes place in the classroom, comparing management tiers that exist in the NUT to those in schools. NUT activists may also experience feelings of vulnerability, stress and burnout. Transformational change is therefore required to support teacher activists to re-establish their sense of dignity and authenticity and enable a positive sense of self and professional identity.

The blurring of boundaries between the personal and the professional impacts on family life yet there is positive support from families because the women teacher activists believe strongly in what they are doing. There is a sense of conflicted roles as a teacher, a mother and an activist. The traditional caring and nurturing roles that women are meant to take on are incorporated with their professional roles and their activist roles. There is also a sense of wanting to be a person, an individual in her own right which entails making sacrifices,

yet determination to accomplish professionalism is in evidence and sacrifices are made to achieve goals.

The women teachers discuss the presence of other barriers to becoming trade union activists, including family expectations, particularly the responsibilities and restrictions imposed by families and their opinions. Similarly, cultural expectations of the role of women challenge re-constructed gendered discourses by confronting long-standing assumptions which are difficult to re-construct. An imposed or innate sense of duty to family, for example, can be used to engender feelings of guilt and disloyalty in abandoning others for their own selfish pursuits. Overt actions such as marches or strike action compete with discursive practices which are at odds with each other.

### **7.3 Activism**

In this section, I present findings on the second significant emergent theme of Activism. The sub-sections indicate further themes which I have noted whilst scrutinising the data. The sub-sections describe the beginnings of the participants' activism, how activism can foster empowerment, the impact on leadership roles, and the impact that activism can have on resilience.

#### **7.3.1 The roots of activism**

The data convey a variety of different ways in which the participants' activism began. It was a specific critical incident which launched Julie's activism.

*I knew that I wanted to teach in an inner city school, a community school, in a school where there's a diverse a population as possible ... and I'd been there for about 4 years when they decided that they were going to turn it into an academy .... When that happened and I saw the process, how corrupt it was, I became politicised and there was no going back after that. You have to have your eyes opened.*

*I was a member of the NUT all the way along. I'm from a fairly left wing family. Naturally I'd join the NUT but I hadn't been that active ... we occupied the school playground ... and we took a leaf out of a guy called X's book. He and other teachers ... occupied a field ... for about 6 months through all weathers. And I was quite inspired by that. We had a little mini occupation. It didn't last 6 months, but a little mini occupation, dressed up as 'Gove Busters' complete with Gove Busters outfits. But apart from that, we've taken part against SATs tests, defending maternity rights ... various anti-academy campaigns and against free schools.*

Having qualified as a teacher in the 1960s, Maureen describes how she became involved with the NUT.

*The staff were years older than me, in fact, the youngest one on the staff was born the same day as Mum, so you can imagine. But when I came back to (the area), there was a union NQT welcome. About a fortnight after I'd come back to (the area), and I went to it, basically because I didn't know anybody and I wasn't doing anything. I was going home, and the preparation wasn't what it is now. I would go home, sit with Mum and Dad and do nothing. So I thought, 'ok, I'll go'.*

*Anyhow, I went to the NQT, probationers' meeting, as it was then. And I hadn't been there, in the room about 5 minutes when somebody came and tapped me on the shoulder. 'Don't you recognise me?' and it was my form prefect the 1<sup>st</sup> year when I was in (school name). And she said to me, 'what are you doing with yourself?' So she said, 'we have a young teachers' club, why don't you come down?' So the next Thursday I went down. I stood talking to, and there were women, 6 or 7 years older than me, and I started meeting them Friday and Saturday. We used to go dancing... They wouldn't do it now, but that's what we did. And I used to stand at the front while they were taking the money, and there'd be about 300 young teachers every week there, and they'd pay their money and there'd be people jamming it, you know, or sit round talking.*

Rose's activism began and grew through the encouragement of colleagues in her school.

*I was already a member of the NUT, but I'd not really gone to meetings or done anything else until I went to (name) Middle School, and because (the secretary and the assistant secretary of the local NUT) were there, we were always involved and encouraged to be involved and they talked to us, so, y'know, they'd sit down in the staffroom and talk about the things they'd been doing and that's when I really got involved... Everybody on the staff were in the NUT. There was a range of activity from nothing to people who went to the odd meeting, but it was from there that I ended up going to Conference for the first time.*

NUT colleagues were instrumental in encouraging Lisa to become and stay active.

*(Name of division secretary), she said, oh, come [to conference] and have a look, see what it's like and so it's progressed from there. Like the invitation was, would you like to come to conference? You don't have to be a delegate, you can just come as an*



*observer, so the first time I went was just for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of conference, in Manchester, and I was just an observer. And I've been coming back since... This is my 6<sup>th</sup> conference.*

Anna describes how she became active in her first teaching job.

*I remember when I went to my first job, which was actually in, my first teaching placement, in fact, my only teaching placement when I was training was at a school in (local area). It was a boys' school, and there was only about 10 or 12 women teachers there out of the whole staff, about 70 staff, 70 teachers, and one of the teachers said to me, in fact my mentor, my PGCE mentor in the school said to me, 'you wanna stay away from that lot. They're trouble', meaning the NUT (laughs)... it was a time of cuts. Cuts in education in the '90s, so there was a lot of local activity and I sort of got involved in that straight away, making placards and being involved and so on and so on.*

Rose discusses how the patriarchal trade union culture was at odds with her own introduction to trade union participation.

*I was a young mother so, em, I'd been teaching for about 7 years by the time I first went to Conference, and I went as an observer... This was just a way of finding something different to do. Not just being mum. Didn't just want to be a mum at the time so I started to become involved in the Union because that's what my friends were doing.*

*I made my...first speech at a special salaries conference, or a special conference where we were considering whether or not we were going to go into the Coventry Agreement which was basically to give up our negotiating rights. It was just before we gave up our negotiating rights and everything went at that point. It was during the Maggie Thatcher period... The early 80s. Late 70s, early 80s. The late 70s I was involved in Conference and made my first speech and met (male executive member) who said 'we can't have these people who don't know what they're doing speaking'. And the 2 people he was talking about were myself and (woman's name)... That was the year we both did our first speeches. And I wrote the speech...I don't always write speeches, but I wrote a speech for every Conference after that.*

*I've been going to Conference, I've been attending local meetings, I've been involved a little bit in equality work – a lot of work around race, a lot of work around gender in the early days – but not heavily involved. I was, it took me a while, but*

*then I became a member of the Primary Advisory committee, so I started to do some more stuff nationally, but all the time teaching.*

Anna explains when and how she became involved with the NUT.

*We were a very strong union group ... I was involved in setting up a women's group within the school of women staff, because there was a few of us there. And later on I sort of was rep or sort of advisory rep with someone else. I'd always played an active role there, and in my 2<sup>nd</sup> school I then became a rep for 11 years.*

Jenny describes how her background and philosophy came together in a decision to become an activist.

*And then I got into school and everything was great, and then I had a little bit of an issue with my boss over a health and safety issue in school. There was a crib, meaning the crib that they bring out once a year, and the head asked the caretaker to creosote it inside. So as we walked into school it just hit. And I had to get in touch with the NUT and that was the birth of my interaction with the NUT as a teacher that needed help and then, because it was so good, it helped me a lot, I ended up. I joined the, I started going along to the general meetings and then I just joined the committee and that was about 13, 14 years ago now.*

Critical incidents, family background and the encouragement of colleagues have all played a part in initiating the journeys the participants have taken to become active in the NUT. The extent to which their union activity began at this early stage is variable, yet all the participants have continued their activism. Some of the women have become activists because of a deep-rooted sense of social awareness, fairness and the need to care for others, while some have become activists as a result of a critical incident which caused them to question the unfairness of a situation in which they found themselves.

There is a strong sense of community throughout their stories, in which they support each other and feel supported by each other as members of the NUT. In knowing they are part of a supportive trade union community, the women are confident in speaking up in the face of what they perceive to be injustice. Indeed, their confidence in themselves and in the strength of their union allows them to speak up to question and challenge union approaches and decisions.

### **7.3.2 Activism: fostering empowerment in self and others**

The data show that the encouragement of other women teachers is an important feature in the stories of the participants. In a bid to inspire change, together with a colleague and fellow activist, Penny has been at the forefront of activism to prevent privatisation through academisation.

*I have been heavily involved in the Anti-Academies movement ... my school was threatened with becoming an academy. One of the 1<sup>st</sup> ones in 2004. So (colleague's name) we're both officers in the Anti-Academies Alliance, and we're both involved in that fight, and that's been a key part of my activism. We had a campaign at my school that we won, and my school is not an academy. And I've been trying to fight ever since to make sure that schools don't become academies, can't be forced to become academies.*

Penny considers how building confidence through her activist stance could bring her vision for a better future to fruition.

*It can be depressing. I don't tend to be a depressed person but when you see children being tested, the phonics test, so you see that happening, in June. The children are reading, trying to decode words and you can see teachers getting frustrated cos they are trying to make sense of the word and then they're marked wrong. And then you see the nursery and Reception, the pressure to be more and more formal and you feel like you are part of the problem and you are causing the children misery. It's very difficult. But then my solution is to get active, to try and change things, to do it through the union. Have a solution and not be depressed by it.*

*I think, for me, I've been in my school, I've been in the same school the whole of my teaching career which is not long, 13 years, and I live locally to my school and my children go to their local school and I am a complete rarity in my school and I think it's a massive shame. And I'm just seeing people come and go and a massive turnover, and young people who aren't going to stay in the local area and I feel sorry for the children. My school is in the bottom quartile for poverty and (local area) is one of the top 20 poorest boroughs in the country and our kids have so many problems and they often want come back to their primary school and see people who give them a bit of stability, as it was maybe a place where they had, where they felt comfortable, and they come back and there's no teachers there, and the pastoral care is really changed since I started there in that short time. I think it was a much more stable, people thought they would stay in their jobs a lot longer. I think the pressure is so much, and there's a kind of, there's an ethos of, 'Get 'em in, they*

*can teach when they're cheap then they can move out when they can't afford to live in the borough'... Or they're burnt out.*

*If I was a head teacher, I would say, 'd'you know what I want? I want to have people who live in the borough, in the school. I want to have aunties and grandmas and people who know the families so you have a real community feel. So those kids are in the heart of somewhere really stable' [pause – fire engine siren]. If I had a home that's chaotic and if I had problems, you know you can come to school and there's teachers that have known you and your family, your sisters and brothers, who you really, are another source that you can really trust. That's all changed and it's really sad.*

Penny promotes activism to encourage more women primary teachers to become involved in order to give some balance to the present demographic.

*And I always say to people, if you make primary a big issue in your branch, you will attract more women because there are more women in primary. I think the stats are something like 'new, young primary school teachers – 86% of them are women' and so if you campaign around those issues, you will attract that demography into your branch. And sorely, sorely needed.*

Anna considers how being active in the union fosters empowerment, particularly for women.

*I got active in the branch and people, right the way from people I knew in the union, have always pushed me to do stuff, which I think, actually, for a woman it has to be done, and that certainly [pause]. I can remember being on the gender advisory after I'd just given birth to (child's name). And I was like, 'are you mad? I've just given birth to a child. How am I gonna go on a national committee?' But the attitude was, 'well why not? Why shouldn't you?' And so, I think a lot of women will, I don't know, maybe not do things. Not that there's a reason not to but think it's a real reason, and I've never been allowed to, I've always been, 'you should do that'. So that's been quite helpful. I've kind of developed that attitude myself a lot to women, other women, bringing other women on, because I think a lot of women say, 'oh, I will speak, but not this time', or 'I will do this, but not this time' or 'I need a bit ...' and I'm like, 'you don't have any more time. You get up now and you say one thing. I don't care if it's a stupid thing, or if it's only for half a minute, but if you keep putting it off till next year or the year... meanwhile all the men are speaking for you.' So I've become a bit of a bully like that, I'm afraid. I do push people forward*

*because otherwise, I don't think you can say, 'oh, it's always the men speaking', if you then say, 'well, alright, you speak' and it's like, 'oh, I couldn't.' 'Well that's not good enough. We've made a space for you to speak. You have to say something.'*

Having been encouraged to speak up herself at meetings, rallies and the annual conference, Anna explains how and why she encourages other women to do the same.

*So it's not something that I feel ... I've always found terrible. I mean, I expect I found in some ways, doing English and drama, but it's still terrifying and I still don't know what I'm, or feel I know what I'm talking about. But because I've been pushed and found myself in that position, actually, I can say something. It's sort of an experience that I've then thought well I'll expect that from you. And there's someone else in my school who's taken over the NUT rep in my school who I've known for a long, long time and she's really come on this year... I saw her yesterday and she said, 'this has been the best year of my life, and you've made me do stuff that I didn't think I could do', and that's true. And it's because somebody has just not taken no for an answer. And it's very good if you need somebody to speak at a rally. You'll say, 'can you get me somebody from your school?' and I'll say, 'can you speak at this rally?' and I'll say, 'Yeah, OK, fine. She can do it,' and then, you know, they can't say no. And what's the worst that can happen if they really don't want to do it? They won't turn up.*

*I think there has to be an expectation that you're capable, and, I mean, when anybody's pushed me to do something, and I've said 'oh, I don't know anything about that', they've said, 'well, I'll help you'. I think we've tried to do that a bit ... with speeches at Conference [pause]. We've taken this attitude, 'we need somebody to speak about this'. 'But I don't know anything about that'. 'Yeah, but he does. So you talk to him, and you write the speech' and, actually, that's the way it should be. I mean, I made that decision. I started off doing gender stuff cos I felt comfortable about that. I'd done a lot of feminism at university and I felt that was my area, that I knew, cos I'm a woman so I know about women, but then I thought, god, that's terribly limiting. So then I thought, those are the debates, of course, this is just at Conference, but those are the debates where you get a lot of women in, so I started looking at areas, not just at Conference, but just generally where you didn't have any women, like salaries, pensions, economy, so hang on a minute. And I didn't think I knew much about these things but I thought, OK I'm going to do something on that. I'm going to write a motion. I'm going to speak on that. So I pushed myself*

*forward to say I'll do this. And then I'd have to go away and find out about it. But then, of course, that was useful because then I became empowered because I had to go and find out about it. So I did know about it. So with the pensions thing, you start off knowing nothing, and now I know quite a lot about pensions. So it becomes self-fulfilling. You then become an expert because you've made yourself an expert.*

Anna explains how women can be encouraged to take part in NUT activism in public spaces.

*Our school is always brilliant in sending people out. It is important, and it's about building expectations. So when we know there's a rally or a demo, well, we basically say we're expecting people to come on this and we do usually get at least a quarter of the staff. We're often one of the highest represented schools, and so on. And that has to be built every time, you know. In terms of getting women, you know, there's questions of children. I've always taken mine, my own daughter on demos if I have to. And obviously it means I don't always stay the whole time, and there are things I can't do, like steward. We're always very keen to get, that's another way of getting young or new people involved, cos you give them a stewarding role. That's not scary in a sense, but we had to steward the demo through London when the police refused to steward it last month and we had hundreds of teachers with a bit of green and purple ribbon stewarding the demo through Victoria in the rush hour. And they were brilliant. And that's very empowering, you know, stopping the traffic in the street. And it's like Reclaim the Night demos, isn't it? The fact that you can stop London on Saturday night and have someone shout at you, and you shout back, and it's like, 'oh, this isn't scary. It's really good.' So I think it's very important that women are on these things. Very important that women are speaking at these things. I think the Union's got much better at making sure of the gender representation, but it does require women prepared to speak.*

In spite of the daunting tasks in which some activists may take part, the participants show that they try and encourage others to take on roles to become confident activists. From marches, demonstrations and rallies to public speaking, other women teachers are persuaded and encouraged to take personal risks to enable them to become confident activists. There is always a sense of a scaffolded approach taking place in which new activists can be empowered in a relatively safe environment, knowing that more experienced activists are supporting them in appropriate ways. There is a sense of empowerment as an antidote to negative

emotions; the solution to which is activism. Activism is perceived as a way of redressing the balance with regard to the male to female ratio in teaching.

It is not only a need for self-protection that drives these women; it is also a determination to protect their colleagues, using their emotional knowledge in a socio-political context, which leads them to empowerment and activism. Many of the teachers explain how their membership and activism in the NUT has accentuated their professional satisfaction and enabled their sense of 'becoming' through transformational change. They describe how their trade union involvement has created a new and positive dimension to their professional sense of being.

Some of the women discuss how the strength of the group dynamics in their schools amongst NUT colleagues allows for excellent teaching against the emotional landscape in which they work. Through mutual support, like-minded teachers are able to work together to improve the outcomes of the children's learning, thus investing in emotional labour and achieving professional satisfaction. Being part of the collective in which teachers share the same institutional discursive practices, teachers experience shared discourses, values and attitudes which maintain emotional wellbeing and stability, enabling resistance. The connectedness of the NUT group enables a group consciousness which facilitates emotional stability to prevent demoralisation and the negative emotions surrounding overwork, stress and 'burnout'.

There is evidence that some of these women teachers are involved in teaching social justice, which is perceived as a highly emotional aspect of teaching. Nevertheless, these women are committed to reaching the wider discursive community in order to promote self-awareness on a wider scale to engender the possibilities of self-transformation. It is evident that there is a great deal of emotional labour involved in such ventures, yet there is a strong sense of professional satisfaction being achieved. Education, to these women, is not primarily about testing and accountability, but much more. The discursive practices of the wider community of NUT activism allow for teachers to engage in emotional labour, enabling children to improve their outcomes, rather than the more limiting work which is commensurate with intention.

### **7.3.3 Activism in leadership roles in the NUT**

Leadership roles within the NUT can be taken up at local or national levels. All leadership roles are available to the membership and members are democratically

elected to the roles. This sub-section deals with the participants' feelings about the work they do in leadership roles in the NUT. The narratives of two of the participant women teachers discussing their feelings makes for a strong context in this section.

Penny discusses the role of women in leadership positions in the NUT in relation to her own experiences. The strength of conviction is evident as she uses her own time to negotiate with her local authority on behalf of the NUT and local teachers. Her desire to 'push the NUT' to facilitate change shows the high level of professionalism in her activist work.

*I mean, we've come today from a meeting with the local authority, in our holidays, trying to thrash out a pay policy. I'm a branch secretary, (colleague's name)'s assistant branch secretary, so we have got leadership of our local branch. Quite unusual in the NUT in terms of having women leading the branch, and I'm a primary school teacher, so it's also quite unusual to have primary school teachers taking a leading role. So our branch has done a lot of work on primary issues and defending primary education. We've launched the Primary Charter, which has now been adopted by the National Union. And Early Years education, we had a really big focus on that in our branch a couple of years ago when they brought in 15 hours. And I'm constantly trying to push the NUT to have more of a focus on primary education and Early Years education cos I think it's a bit of a sector that doesn't get heard.*

Rose describes how she worked as a head teacher whilst becoming more involved at a higher level in the NUT. She was also a mother at the same time.

*You do it because it's what you want to do, but I couldn't just do that. I couldn't just work and do things, y'know, be a mum. I had to have something else and that's where the Union have always been. Throughout the period I was a head teacher... I was there for 15 years, continued to be involved in Conference, continued, I stood and was elected to the Conference Business Committee. I was on various committees that were set up to talk about how we could make Conference better. I did some of those things. Never thought of standing for the Executive, though I was asked a number of times by my colleagues and friends because they felt I could do it.*

Rose reflects upon her term as the National President of the NUT. Despite of the intense nature of the emotional and physical labour she is demonstrating, she perceives little care forthcoming from the NUT. Her presidential year was 'very hard'



and very busy and there are signs of mixed emotions as she describes the satisfaction she felt whilst executing her presidential work combined with the neglect she experienced from the NUT.

*... it was a hard year, the year of the Presidency, being President, because you were...the Union works you very hard. They're not very good at looking after you. I'll be blatantly honest, and other ex-Presidents would say the same thing. But basically, the expectation is that you can. And I think they treat (General Secretary) and (Deputy General Secretary) in exactly the same way. You can be in Stoke Rochford (NUT training centre), opening, I did this, Stoke Rochford, opening a health and safety conference in the morning. At lunchtime, you're on a train and you're speaking at another, em, it was the Right to Work conference in the afternoon and then you're back at Stoke Rochford in the evening, entertaining another crowd... London, then back to Lincoln. I did much worse than that. I did London to Cornwall to Devon to London. I mean, it takes you days but, I did Canada, Australia, Melbourne, Sydney, you name it...I did some fantastic stuff. I like helping people.*

After her presidential year ended, Rose was at a loss as to how to continue working in the NUT due to the loss of this major role. Although she has exchanged some of her professional skills to volunteer with the NUT, there is a deep sense of pain permeating through her words.

*I'm volunteering my time to the Union as a caseworker because I can't bear not to use the skills that I've built up. The skills that I've built up being working with the National Union for 4 years as an officer, because you do Junior Vice, Vice, President and then ex-President. I'm now a Past President... You've basically got 4 years on the National Executive. I thought it'd be like Junior Vice President does a bit, goes a bit to London, y'know, Vice President does a bit more, then President, loads, Past President maybe not so much... Doesn't work like that at all, but when you stop, you stop. The Easter when I stopped being ex-President and fell off the platform, you stop existing. Apart from, and I told you about that little meeting when you go to the (former) Presidents' Society. But, yes, I do spend a lot of my time judging myself about whether or not I'm too ... I am actually quite a humble person, so if somebody is hinting that I'm being too head teachery, or too boastful about something... it's the gut and heart of me. It really hurts.*

The pain and sense of regret are sharply echoed in Rose's words. The range of negative emotions she describes when her presidential year finished, from feeling

ignored in 'it's like you don't matter' to cutting ties with personal international trade union links, runs very deep. Yet she had 'wonderful' experiences during her time of office. However, the feelings that remain with her are those which encapsulate the neglect she perceives from the NUT and the waste of her skills and talents.

*It stopped. So all the skills and abilities, the people you've met. I am friends on Facebook and Twitter with ... the General Secretary of the NAHT... the General Secretaries of the unions across the world, I went to, in Thailand, the first international, whatever it's called, when the teacher unions all get together, er, er, Education International. Education International had their first Women's Conference in Thailand in the year I was President, and I went and it was THE most wonderful experience. (Female National Vice President) and I delivered some training at that conference. So I met women from around the world who were movers and shakers in their union. I got to know and like a lot of people. A lot of like ex-Presidents of other unions, and it goes. Because nobody is interested in, and it's right, the President and the people who are officers there and then are what they focus on. But what they don't do, they don't utilise the skills and abilities of people that have gone. So it's like you don't matter. They had that conference. They had an ex-President in, very close to (venue), but they don't think that that's important. I thought it was interesting that there wasn't any of the officers, any of the national officers at that meeting, cos that's political, and the national officers are not political. They're not utilised at all. You don't see them quoted in the newspapers.*

Reflecting on her presidential year, Rose believes herself to be 'lucky' to have had unique experiences. However, in the wake of the consequent relinquishment of the role, it is obvious that Rose greatly misses these times.

*When I was President... I got to go and be... well, as an officer, I was really lucky. I was the only woman officer for quite a while so as Junior Vice President, when the President was (a man), so I went to the Women's Conference (Women's TUC Conference). As Vice President, the President was (a man), so I went, I led the delegation to the Women's Conference. When I was President, I led the delegation to the Women's Conference then I was gutted. I was gutted because as ex-President, (a woman) was the President and she led the delegation to the Conference! I wasn't allowed to go! It was gutting. So this year, I fought long and hard with the (regional) people and got to go again. I went as an observer, but (national equalities officer), bless her, made me a full delegate, even though I wasn't supposed to be.*

The experiences of executing leadership roles in the NUT show that the participants feel strongly about representing their union and are proud to do so. They invest a great deal of their physical and emotional labour in their roles even though their investment may prove to be disappointing in consequence, resulting in tiredness, stress and frustration. Sometimes the skills that have been acquired as a result of learning what needs to be done become redundant, leading to feelings of pain, a sense of loss and worthlessness.

## **Conclusions**

Critical incidents, family background and the encouragement of colleagues have all played a part in initiating the journeys the participants have taken to become active in the NUT. The extent to which their union activity began at this early stage is variable, yet all the participants have continued their activism. There is a strong sense of community throughout their stories, in which they support each other and feel supported by each other as members of the NUT. In knowing they are part of a supportive trade union community, the women are confident in speaking up in the face of what they perceive to be injustice. Their confidence in themselves and in the strength of their union allows them to speak up to question and challenge trade union approaches and decisions.

In spite of the daunting tasks in which some activists may take part, the participants encourage other women to take on roles to become confident activists. There is a sense of a scaffolded approach taking place in which new activists can be empowered in a relatively safe environment, knowing that more experienced activists are supporting them in appropriate ways. There is a sense of empowerment as an antidote to negative emotions. Activism is perceived as a way of redressing the balance with regard to the male to female ratio in teaching. It is not only a need for self-protection that drives these women; it is also a determination to protect their colleagues, using their emotional knowledge in a socio-political context, which leads them to empowerment and activism. Many of the teachers explain how their membership and activism in the NUT has accentuated their professional satisfaction and enabled their sense of 'becoming' through transformational change. They describe how their trade union involvement has created a new and positive dimension to their professional sense of being.

Some of the women discuss how the strength of the group dynamics in their schools amongst NUT colleagues allows for excellent teaching against the emotional landscape in which they work. Through mutual support, like-minded teachers are able to work together to improve the outcomes of the children's

learning, thus investing in emotional labour and achieving professional satisfaction. Being part of the collective in which teachers share the same institutional discursive practices, teachers experience shared discourses, values and attitudes which maintain emotional wellbeing and stability, enabling resistance. The connectedness of the NUT group enables a group consciousness which facilitates emotional stability to prevent demoralisation and the negative emotions surrounding overwork, stress and 'burnout'.

Some participants are involved in teaching social justice, which Zembylas perceives as a highly emotional aspect of teaching. Nevertheless, the women teachers are committed to reaching the wider discursive community in order to promote self-awareness on a wider scale to engender the possibilities of self-transformation. There is a great deal of emotional labour involved in such ventures, yet there is also a strong sense of professional satisfaction being achieved. Education, to these women, is not primarily about testing and accountability, but much more. The discursive practices of the wider community of NUT activism allow for teachers to engage in emotional labour, enabling children to improve their outcomes, rather than the more limiting work which is commensurate with intention.

The experiences of executing leadership roles in the NUT show that the participants feel strongly about representing their union and are proud to do so. They invest a great deal of their physical and emotional labour in their roles even though their investment may prove to be disappointing in consequence, resulting in tiredness, stress and frustration. Sometimes the skills that have been acquired as a result of learning what needs to be done become redundant, leading to feelings of pain, a sense of loss and worthlessness.

## **7.4 Identity**

In this section, I present findings on the third significant emergent theme of Identity. The sub-sections indicate further themes which I have noted whilst scrutinising the data. The sub-sections describe how the participants cope with instability and a sense of 'becoming', the realities of being active in the NUT, and how their identity has been influenced by family.

### **7.4.1 Identity: instability and a sense of 'becoming'**

As the participants embark upon a career in teaching and begin to hone their activism, there is a sense of 'becoming' as they progress. Some of the steps are

natural, travelling forward in a positive direction whereas some are unexpected and adjustment to the new circumstances may be necessary.

Yasmin's journey in developing her identity as a teacher was not without difficulties. As previously mentioned in this chapter, Yasmin was married with children by the age of 17. She was expected to look after her husband, children and their home so her educational potential had not been achieved as she reached adulthood. Her sense of self at this point was that of a wife and mother. However, in order to develop a personal sense of self, Yasmin began to address her absence of formal educational qualifications.

*I started the basic literacy and numeracy and [the lecturer] spotted, 'you know, you should go on and do more. You're capable of doing a lot more and, you know, maybe you need to think of doing an Access course with an element of Black History, etcetera,' and to do my literacy and numeracy GCSEs, etcetera, and she actually encouraged me to do that. And again, I thought, can I do it with my 2 kids? And I did. And as I was doing that, and the voluntary work at school, it kind of seemed, oh, I'll try and go for teaching. And I applied to go to 3 universities and I was accepted at [two].*

*Initially, they rejected me without seeing me and then I realised they had rejected all the applications from the Black Access course which were then queried, and then I got my interview then. And I remember going for the interview ... the one who was interviewing me, and he was horrible. And when he asked me the basic questions of why I wanted to go into teaching, he then, his parting shot was, 'well, I suppose we need someone from the community.' And at that point, I didn't really question it, but when I received the offer from [the university], I accepted it, mainly because of the childcare, because of my kids and working around that because I could drop them off and take them home, all of that. So that's what I did. That's how it all started really.*

Yasmin soon became a critical thinker, questioning procedures and shifting from instability to a state of 'becoming'. Her confidence grew as she began to mould her identity as a trainee teacher.

*I began to question things when I was at the university. There were certain gaps, for example, equal opportunities we had one lecture on, and we had 4 titles which you could choose from and we had that as an essay and that was from one lecture. Things like that. And I remember thinking, this isn't right. This isn't getting*

*people ready for ....for going in. And everybody else on that course, apart from me, were white. And a lot of them had come from a range of different backgrounds and that they'd never seen any black people. And in the villages where they had done their experiences. I remember listening to people and they were saying, 'well I thought this and I thought this', so that kind of boosted me, thinking, well I know something.*

In continuing to become a teacher, Yasmin's capacity for critical thinking developed to such a degree that she was able to allow circumstances to facilitate change in order to make progress in her career and knowledge. She is transforming from a trainee and taking on the identity of a qualified teacher.

*I went into four challenging primary schools and I had four very good practices, and on my 4<sup>th</sup> one ... everyone said, oh god, well if you can survive there, it's a baptism of fire, and it was a very challenging primary school and I was in the Year 2 class and I felt, you know, I realised that the deputy and the head were very impressed.*

*And then asked me to, while I was waiting for official notification that I'd passed, asked me to do some supply, in Key Stage 2. And then when a vacancy came up, there was a vacancy for Year 2 or Year 6 and I actually wanted the Year 2 class, but I felt I was being manoeuvred to Year 6 and I felt that, you know what, they must be able to see something that they know that I can do it, so I did. And I had 2 years at that school and I actually absolutely loved it.*

As mentioned previously in this chapter, Carol gave up her teaching career temporarily to become a full time wife and mother. Once she felt able to return to teaching, having done what she describes as her 'duty', she became more politically active with the NUT. Her professional identity evolved from working as a classroom teacher to taking on significant roles in the NUT and the General Teaching Council. She explains how the transformation took place.

*In 2000 I had the first General Teaching Council (position), for the Union, even though it wasn't strictly speaking union work. So I did that for 4 years and that kind of gave me a taste, I think, for other things. And I met people who were on the National Executive and had meetings in Hamilton House (NUT HQ). I think they quite whetted my appetite in a way, and as a result of that, I became more interested in the political side of the Union. I became involved with one of the groups and worked in that and it never occurred to me that I'd be President of the*

*Union, especially because I'd never been a member of the National Executive... And, you know, it's a huge honour when you're nominated as a teacher to be elected as an officer of the Union by your peers, so it's really quite something.*

Rose reflects on life after teaching, having enjoyed a successful career as a head teacher and high level activist. However, her heart is still that of a teacher.

*I love teaching. I miss children and the thing I miss the most is that I'm very good with my relationships with children. That was a strength. I probably spent too much of my time with children, you know, an Ofsted inspector nowadays would say, 'well, you're the head teacher. You should be going round with a clipboard and ticking lessons, not talking to children. Stop it.' But I didn't care. That was the way I operated.*

Having gained confidence in her own ability and in her identity as a teacher, Yasmin reflects on how she successfully challenged racism from both children and parents. In gaining confidence, she is transforming from instability to 'becoming'.

*I was approached by a head teacher who had heard of me... and the school was all white in an inner city primary school in a multi-ethnic area and she told me, it's a Year 6 class and there are only meant to be 15 of them but don't be fooled by that, and they are 15 of the most challenging children who've been excluded from neighbouring schools... and the school is all white because the parents have kept it all white and it will be hard. But I can promise you one thing, that you will be supported by me and the staff, should you encounter any difficulties. So it sounded like a great challenge so I went for it, and my very first day there, I was approached by a parent who looked me up and down and said, 'my child is not going to be taught by a Paki.' And I had 15 children who also said similar and, talk about, really kind of, erm, I had children climbing on tables, underneath chairs, walking out if you were trying to talk and teach, and it was only about a few weeks in that I noticed that every time I took my scarf off and I put it down on the chair, I would notice children kind of go up to the scarf and touch the scarf. So then the next day I brought in a basket full of scarves, and I said, 'there's plenty of scarves there if anyone wants to wear them or touch them, that's fine. However, there's one rule. You've got to stay in your seats. And, you know, you've got to do our work. You're welcome to use any', and that was the first time.*

Maureen remembers how curriculum changes affected her teaching career, reflecting the instability that the profession can initiate. Yet from institutional

instability, she was able to transform her skills to become more proficient and gain more knowledge and qualifications. Eventually she initiates a new transition, leading to her retirement and another new sense of identity.

*In 1984, when I took maternity leave, when I came back the National Curriculum was on the way and I got back to school and they were dishing out all the curriculum areas and everybody dodged science, which I knew absolutely nothing about. So I was pushed on all the courses and I later did a certificate of Primary Science ... And then I became one of the 6 team leaders from the City for implementing the science curriculum in the primary school. That's when I was teaching as well as doing everything else (laughs)... In the 90s, I did my Masters in Special Needs ... and then I did a Masters in Dyslexia.*

*So in 2003 I took early retirement. It got to the point when, you know, I'd taught 38 years and I'd had enough. You know, the spark that you have as a young teacher wasn't there. I'd had enough of all the new innovations. When I went in on a Monday morning there was something new coming, and I just got the opportunity to go, and let the youngster with more energy than me take over.*

Lisa discusses a personal dilemma as, having worked as a supply teacher, she has encountered situations when there was so little teaching work that she was compelled to work as a teaching assistant. Her sense of identity and the state of constantly 'becoming' is evidently confusing to her, but she is driven primarily by her desire to work with children, in spite of conflicting roles. This mindset is in line with the traditional nurturing role historically assigned to women.

*Em, well it's changed since last summer, because up to last summer, there wasn't a lot of teaching, simply because (area) City Council employ us and others use agencies and they were charging the full rate and the others weren't. So the schools learned to call the agencies because they were cheaper. (City Council) made the decision that they needed to be on parity with the agencies so although it sounds silly, I'm actually earning less a day as a teacher, I'm actually earning more because I used to spend my days working as a TA... [I did this] simply because I wanted to do SOME work and I kept getting asked back to be a TA and then, of course, I was busy being a TA on the occasions I might have been asked to teach. So I became my own problem, in a way. I liked what I was doing ... I liked working with the children. At one point I did find the supply work was getting me down. Somehow I fell into working in some of the more tricky schools and I reached a point where I couldn't deal with it. In fact, I made a conscious decision for a year or*



*two to just be a TA. Then I came back to, yeah, I can do that now. I'll go back to the teaching. I can still do it... And I'm so busy doing supply teaching that it's just taking over. I'm working just about full time really.*

*That's one of the advantages of doing supply. If you don't like somewhere, you don't go back. And if they don't like you, they don't ask you back. It's a mutual system.*

There is a strong sense amongst the women of a constant state of 'becoming' as they examine their own positions within their institutions, consequently becoming self-aware. Formal qualifications as a means of transformational change, as discussed by Maureen and Yasmin, enabled them to develop a coherent sense of identity in an unstable educational landscape. Critical thinking allows teachers to become more confident, facilitating transformational change.

New self-knowledge leads teachers to a need for a locus of resistance which they find within the NUT. The constant sense of 'becoming', from a teacher to an active NUT official, is sometimes a daunting prospect, yet there is evidence that barriers of self-disbelief can be demolished through the support and encouragement of other NUT women teacher activists.

In some institutions, there can be ambiguities in which colleagues find it difficult to resolve what they perceive as multi-dimensional, and sometimes conflicting, aspects of the teacher's identity. The women teachers continue to challenge these assumptions – that teacher identity and trade union activist identity are in conflict with each other - by constantly developing their own self-awareness to promote transformational change, drawing strength from their roles in the NUT to enable the preservation of a positive outlook on their work and promote resistance.

#### **7.4.2 Identity as a teacher and an NUT activist**

The women teachers explain how their involvement in the NUT has evolved from their work as teachers, presenting local and national activist roles. Once they have retired from teaching, some have exchanged their skills to work exclusively for the NUT. Sometimes, the instability that confronts them as teachers can be balanced in their lives against the confidence they gain through their activist roles. Sometimes it is difficult to separate the two aspects of their identity. In both cases, as a teacher and as an activist, these women expend large amounts of emotional labour throughout their work. There is a strong sense of connectedness to both roles.

After being seconded to another teaching post, Yasmin returned to her school and became the NUT rep. She describes how she identifies herself as a teacher and how she navigates her role in the NUT. Both roles are substantively connected to her identity.

*I can't remember if somebody suggested, well, have you got a rep in school or I said I'll become the rep. But because I'd done it before, but before, it was very tokenistic. I didn't really know what I was doing, but from there, it was like a voyage of discovery really. I started to attend the meetings, and read the information they were sending me, and gradually, over the years, I've attended more, participated more, attended conferences and just feel as though, you know, totally, totally committed in trade union activity and I'm very, very fortunate that, not only am I, you know, sort of, learn so much about it myself, but the fact that I am able to share that with several people in school and people in school are all aware that I'm the union rep and also a senior member of staff, that can be something that...I remember when one of the...she was the deputy at the time, she mentioned, she said, 'well, do you think you should really be the union rep considering you're in senior management?' I said, 'why not? Where does it say that you shouldn't be?' She said, 'well, there's a clash of commitment', so I said, 'well, if I felt it was that, or if they felt it was that, at least I know where they can go to get help and I can give them the information'. It doesn't mean that I have to be the person that they talk to and I won't take it personally if they don't, and the fact that I'm a port of call really. And the more that I read about it, the more I got into it, I feel as though I have really grown in my awareness. And it's actually made a difference to so many different areas of my life cos ....for my beliefs, and I think that, as a result of being proactive, becoming an activist has actually helped clarify my ethics and my own values.*

*I do it cos it's something I believe in. I do because I know it makes a difference. I do because I believe that we need to be out there. We need to try and protect our profession.*

Rose discusses the dilemmas of being a head teacher and a member of the NUT rather than choosing to become a member of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT). As a member of the NUT, she is being true to herself as a teacher, yet it is sometimes difficult for the teachers in her school to understand this as there is a blurring of boundaries regarding the senior leadership roles. Being a member of the NAHT might clarify the boundaries, but Rose would not be able to support colleagues in the same way, the NAHT being perceived as an elitist club for

head teachers. As an NUT rep, however, she is able to support colleagues. Her identity as a teacher and an NUT activist is strong, yet she has had difficulties in initially convincing others of this.

*They are lovely, some of my colleagues. They don't like head teachers, many of them, and that's the problem... And I believe that I stayed in the NUT because in my heart I'm a teacher and when I go and represent the members that I represent now with all sorts of issues, all sorts of troubles, and I tell them I'm a head teacher, and by the time we've finished they always say, I wish I'd been at your school. This would never have happened to me. And it wouldn't. I'm defending a teacher. I'm going to talk a teacher out of her job on Monday because I've persuaded her she can't go back. She's just about to go into competency... I went to her house yesterday and we were talking about the end of her career at this school and when she'll teach again cos she's a good teacher, and she'll teach and she'll get another job, but this school have broken her apart and taken her to pieces... They want her to teach literacy and numeracy and they won't let her teach properly, so she's failing.*

Maureen's activism grew, as she explains here. During her working life, her teaching career and her NUT activist work have become closely linked.

*I went on to the local committee in 1969 and they said, you know, young teachers should go to Conference. I went there and I went to Scarborough and I went to Harrogate, and then I virtually took over the Young Teachers section as well. I didn't intend to but I did.*

*1975, I was President of the Division. I carried on, sort of, on the committee. Lancashire Young Teachers was absolutely fantastic. You know, the whole lot of them took an active role. In 1980, I took over as secretary of the TSB (Teachers' Benevolent Fund).*

Maureen has continued working for the NUT since retirement. She discusses some of the issues that have affected her. She has exchanged some of the skills she used as a teacher to inform the work she does at her Regional Office. More evidently, she is still investing heavily in emotional labour to help other teachers. Her identity as a teacher is still an important aspect of her role which she draws upon to enhance her knowledge and understanding when dealing with the queries of other teachers. The connectedness between her roles as a teacher and an activist are evidenced here, despite her being a retired teacher.

*So I finished (teaching) in 2003, and the secretary said, 'could you come and give me a hand in the office because you're interested'. And I've got office skills as well because I took ICT in school because nobody else would and I trained everybody in ICT in school, so I'd got the ICT skills which the others didn't have at the time. So I was working one day a week to cover another day and I finished up doing 5 days a week, doing a lot of clerical work initially, and as soon as I'd finished I went on to TSN [Teachers Support Network, formally TFB] National Council for the North West. So I did that for 8 years. I was also on the union Mental Health working party for 3 years as one of the 3 lay people... I did quite a bit of training. I trained as a disability champion, a TUC disability champion. I did a lot of work with stress and mental health.*

*Even now, we're getting people who were born 1953, they've got to wait till they're 63 for their State Pension, and then, what's going to happen is, there's going to be less pension. I mean, I am lucky, because I got virtually a full teachers' pension and I was SMT [senior management team] before I finished, so I'm lucky.*

*Well, at the moment, I'm on the Teachers' Disability Forum and I'm on Regional Council. I'm off TSN cos I can't cope with the travelling up and down. I drive but I use hand controls, so I'll go anywhere within the (area). I just don't want to. I do think, you know, I'm 68 next month and I do think, you know, it's time for other people. If a younger person came in and said, 'look, you know, I'll shadow you for a bit and take over', I'd be happy about that. But unfortunately we don't seem to be getting the younger people in.*

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Jenny became a member of the NUT while still a student. Her NUT involvement has changed a great deal since then, showing how her identity in the Union has not been stable. Yet the connectedness between her identity as a teacher and her role as an activist has been constant. Her highly developed sense of fairness is an intrinsic aspect of her identity which supports her as a teacher and also as an activist. She reflects on her own personality and how she believes that her own early experiences have become interwoven with her role as a school rep.

*They had a stand, like the usual, giving you freebees, whatever, and it was literally, there was no thing like why I shouldn't. I didn't know anything about either of the unions and I just signed up that day, and I did sign up to the best one, thankfully.*

*[I] just started going along to the reps' meetings, had regular reps' meetings in school. Loved it. Absolutely loved it. And I think it's because, I think it was part of my personality anyway, because when I look back, even in secondary schools, I went to 5 secondary schools when I was younger. I've always been a bit of a people person, but I've always seen myself as, sort of, fighting against injustices. You know, even pulling your car over when you see two teenagers fighting. I've not ever being frightened. Then you think, it's just been a natural role for me to progress into. So I started going along to all the general meetings. I was rep, and then, I can't remember if they approached me to be a member, oh, I found out there was a committee and I attended that for a while and then I just decided with (son's name) going off to university that it was the right time to maybe go one step further and go for the officers, because it's a lot of meetings. I was a governor as well, and I've got other interests, and there didn't seem to be much time, and I knew that this would be an extra, a pull on my time. But it's been fine.*

Currently, Jenny has taken on extra NUT work. She reflects on what that work entails and how she places herself in the context of other NUT members. There is a definite sense of 'becoming' as she describes her new role, yet the description of her activism during strike action imposes barriers upon her identity as an activist. Using words such as 'just' supports her perception of her own identity as an activist. It implies that she does not feel as important as other union members. However, what she describes constitutes important emotional labour.

*I'm an Equalities Officer. But brand new to the role, so I'm still finding my feet. I'm still the rep. I've been trying to give that away to someone but they won't take it. Opening the mail, putting all the posters up, watching the dates for meetings, it's just an added extra role, so I've still got that. And I'm a member of the committee as well.*

(Speaking about her involvement in a recent strike) *Mine was just personal, just the rally. I went along to the committee meetings, and you're giving all of your ideas about the strike, but I didn't have any direct involvement of organisation on the day. And I was an unofficial steward, so I wore an orange thing and it was just giving whistles out and things like that but nothing like the other members.*

Carol discusses her role in the NUT, particularly in view of a forthcoming strike, and how she perceives the obligations of all NUT members. She identifies very strongly with the Union and purports a strong sense of loyalty in declaring that teachers who are Union members should abide by union rules. Her identity as a teacher is the

underlying driving force for her identity as an activist. The connectedness between her roles as a teacher and an activist is very strong.

*Well, as an officer, I'm involved in the public face part of it, in terms of the rallies, and as a teacher, whenever I was asked to go on strike, I was always quite happy to do it, partly because of how I was brought up, partly because that's why you're in a union. We all have our part to play in the union and as a member, that is the part that we play, so I will always explain the reasons, and in this case it lies in conditions, pay, pensions and trade dispute and often people say they can't afford to go out on strike. Well, you really can't afford not to cos of what you're liable to lose in the future. I know for some people it is a very difficult decision to make, but we expect the union to support us as members, and I think the reverse of that is that its members have to support the union. Because we're very, for all of my life and beyond, the rights to be in a trade union are just taken as an accepted right, but I think increasingly it's going to be more of a privilege to be in a union and every member is going to have to take a part to ensure that unions continue because they certainly haven't got the right to smash the teacher union so we'll have to do everything in our power to stop them doing that. And there's more and more people taking a tiny, active part in what's happening so they have a stronger base... I don't think it should be left to Div Secs (Division Secretaries) or Executive members or the paid officials of the union. I think everybody has a part to play in the work of the Union.*

As mentioned previously in this chapter, Lisa has been compelled to work as a supply teacher, resulting in reduced pay, due to difficulties in obtaining a permanent teaching post. I asked Lisa if she would like to play a more active part on her committee as the local association president, having been vice president for four years.

*No. I have threatened to leave the union if they tried to do that! ... I would be absolutely horrified if I had to stand up at General Meetings and welcome guests and visitors. It would drive me nuts! I'd run a mile! ... It sounds silly, but I don't think it's something I CAN do. I haven't got little anecdotal tales to tell...Everyone else seems to manage it. But not me.*

It is evident in the data that the women enjoy the work they do for the NUT. They represent colleagues and encourage colleagues to be more proactive as ordinary members. Some participants express a strong sense of connectedness with their union work and their professional lives, such as training teachers in ICT, supporting strike action

and making a difference to the profession, stating that the work they do for the union is complementary to their professional views and values. The harmony they experience in this way allows them to forge a greater depth of commitment in their professional and activist lives, causing their identities as teachers and activists to experience a degree of symbiosis. The impact of retirement on the women's professional identity is a significant factor here. Some seek to continue using the skills they have honed through their work as teachers, often investing their emotional labour as activists helping other teachers, regaining the connectedness between their teaching and activist skills.

Through exchanging the investment of their emotional labour within schools for emotional labour as NUT activists, some of the women teachers report a sense of personal and professional satisfaction in helping other teachers. Teachers who have become vulnerable through the constant changes in policy and seeking NUT help are able to meet with these women who describe how the co-constructing of new narratives is a feature that is used to enable success to be achieved after stress and 'burnout'. However, some of the women teacher activists do not believe themselves to be equal to other NUT activists, perceiving a hierarchy and considering themselves to inhabit a lesser role. To enable authentic self-transformation, such teachers need to achieve a more balanced sense of self-awareness to establish greater confidence in their own abilities, particularly when the educational landscape is unstable.

#### **7.4.3 Identity and family influences**

This sub-section presents findings which evidence family influences in the lives of the participants, many of whom have followed in the footsteps of family members in becoming trade union activists. Some participants have strong familial roots which have shaped their professional identities.

Brenda's parents' trade union activities became the foundation for her own activism. Her parents were her role models having been directly involved with trade unionism all their lives. Instinctively she chose to belong to a trade union and after careful consideration, made her choice.

*I've always been a trade unionist and always felt that people should have rights and those rights should be defended. My family...my father was the shop steward at the factory he worked at. My mother was always the branch secretary for BT. She worked there, so I've always grown up being surrounded by people who spoke about trade union values. So there was no question of me not belonging to a trade union, but I do think the NUT of all the unions have the most to offer in terms*

*of its professional, er, aspects to it and the education work particularly. Its record for standing up for all teachers, and women, and being very much in the forefront of the equal pay campaign also meant that that was the union I wanted to belong to.*

The men in Carol's family instilled a strong sense of work ethic and trade unionism which carried her forward into a career in teaching and activism. There is no mention of the influence of women, in her family or otherwise. There is a sense that in spite of being encouraged to teach, she is still expected to function in a supportive, possibly subservient, role to men as a female, particularly putting her career on hold in favour of supporting her husband's career and looking after her children.

*Well, my father became a teacher when he came out of the RAF, a little after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, and he came from a very working class background. Father was a miner and my other grandfather was a coal miner and my father just thought it was a wonderful job with wonderful opportunities and a great way of helping other people who came from similar backgrounds. And I suppose, you know, you just take everything by osmosis, all my childhood, and he was also very insistent on us, in the very early 50s, that girls had equal rights with boys when it came to education, which was quite unusual then. And I loved my primary school education. It was my ambition to go back and teach in the junior school that I'd attended. I did actually achieve that... I went from school to university... I did a degree and then I did a PGCE... I got the chance to go back to the school I'd attended, so I went back there and I taught there for 19 years.*

*My husband wasn't in a lot. He was a head. And I'd say, in my life I've had it all, but I've had it all sequentially, so I came into my own. I had a very late adolescence, in my 50s I would say... I did feel strongly it was my duty for my children and it was my job to see that they were alright.*

Lisa's identity is initially defined by her own family. As with Carol, there is a sense here that Lisa puts the needs of her own family before her commitment to her NUT work, in spite of a desire to be pro-active in the Union. She has been nurtured herself by her NUT colleagues to enable her to continue to be active within the NUT, in spite of her family commitments. There is a sense in which her NUT colleagues constitute a 'family' for her.

*Just with doing supply work, you're not conscious of what's happening. You don't know what's happening. And it was my decision to go to (NUT) meetings and keep in*



*touch with what was going on... It was just so I knew what was happening. People kept referring to this, that and the other and I went what, what? I'm still going what? But... (laughs)...And if I don't know I can always find out. Because I was showing up to meetings quite regularly I was asked if I would go on the (area) teachers' panel and I said yes to that. It was fine until I became pregnant and I thought, well this isn't going to work out. I can't do it. So I stopped doing that, although I did go to the Union meetings. Got (child's name) to school, had (baby) (laughs) cos they still remember me taking (baby) in the baby seat to meetings...he just slept through it (laughs)! When he got slightly older and a bit more wakeful there was a gap when I didn't go. But by that time everyone had become friends, as much as anything. So when life permitted, I went back to it... It was the same few. It always is, isn't it?... And it stayed that way for a long, long time until (name of member) moved across this way from Lancashire and (name of member) became secretary and there was a big shuffle around and they're looking at me and I'm going, I don't really want to do an awful lot. Can I just be a plain, simple committee member (laughs)?... And finally they're looking at me and, er, I became vice president. There we go.*

Anna's mother's teaching career and trade union work were instrumental in her decision to continue in her mother's footsteps. Her mother appears to be a strong female role model, influencing her ultimate decision to become a teacher and subsequent trade unionist. There is a sense of pride as she explains how her identity as a teacher and an activist came about.

*My mum was a teacher and I saw what kind of a demanding job it was and how it took up all her life really. And so, I didn't know what I wanted to do, but the one thing I knew I didn't want to do was be a teacher. That was until I was about 29... I'd been brought up in a unionised, political environment, so I just felt I wanted to be working somewhere where my day to day life had an impact or had a meaning... And so that was kind of the awakening so actually I thought, teaching, one of these things I didn't want to do, because it then became the things, the reasons why I did want to do it so there was a bit of a change in my attitude when I got, when I grew up, I think.*

Socialism was a dominant aspect of Penny's family life. Both her mother and grandmother were teachers, influencing her choice of career as well as her trade union activist potential. These female role models, as with Anna, play a significant part, encouraging the younger women of their family and creating a platform for confidence and empowerment to thrive.

*Well my mum is a teacher and my grandma was a teacher and I'd always vowed I would never be a teacher, but then when I was in my mid 30s my children's school was threatened with closure and I was part of a campaign to keep it open and I spent about 6 months camping out in a school, campaigning, and I actually thought, 'I like the atmosphere in this school', and so I decided to bite the bullet and do teacher training. I got involved in trade union politics in the civil service and I was actually a branch secretary locally. So when I became a teacher, it was in my blood. I joined the trade union and I'd go to the meetings. It's a tradition. It's in the family. I come from a family of Socialists so it's something I would always do.*

Jenny's 'left-wing family' had a strong influence on her instinctive step to become an activist. Again, her mother is the dominant figure and role model who has enabled her identity to flourish.

*I do have this mantra of, and I've had it all through my life, 'just stand up for what's right, even if you stand alone'. And I've always spouted it to every class that I've ever taught and my own children and anyone I meet and that was, sort of, from my mum, really. Even though she wasn't a member of a trade union, we were from a left-wing family and, just from a moral standpoint really.*

Yasmin explains how her family has come to terms with her identity as an NUT activist. Having to prove to her daughters that her activism was not a temporary 'phase', she was able to finally elicit their empathy and gain their admiration. Not only are her daughters proud of her, but her sister and other family members have come to take pride in her commitment to activism. She has become a role model herself for the women in her family through identifying with her firm beliefs in trade union activism.

*Because it's interesting that my children, when they hear that I've gone off on a march or whatever, that initially they were kind of 'this is a phase that mum's going through', and then they fully understood what I am involved in. And I went to the march in London and that day there was a big family event at my sister's house and I wasn't there, and my youngest daughter told me that, when they asked about where's your mum, she mentioned that mum's gone on a march in London. And they said, 'really!' and they were very surprised. You know, an Asian woman going out there, thinking, well, if it's your mother she must be middle aged, and then my daughter told me that when she tried to explain to them, my mum's always been into equality, she wants to make sure she makes a difference, and she said they seemed quite taken aback and very impressed by that. I kind of laughed and said,*

*'did that shock you?' and she said, 'well, I didn't know what they might say or what they might, you know, what their belief would be.' And I got the feeling, even though she didn't say it, she felt kind of proud of me.*

Maureen describes how her caring family background translated into her union work. Although both her parents were trade union members, neither were activists. Like Lisa, it appears that Maureen found an NUT 'family' in her school which was instrumental in influencing her activist identity as well as her professional identity.

*They [the staff] were all NUT members and they were all good, because in (the school) we went on strike for a few days in the middle of the year, over compulsory dinner duties, and we had a rolling set of strikes in (the area) you went on for weeks. Everybody came out on strike. I wasn't terribly unionised. I don't come from a union background... our background actually is, we're church-goers in the old committed Christian sense. That was our background.*

Irrespective of the participants' feelings towards such challenges as the relationship between the government and the profession, autonomy and control, the common element that binds these women is the influence of their families. There is a formidable sense of family influence which has led the participants to become activists. Nurturing plays a substantial role in this occurrence, whether it involves encouragement or acceptance, and there is a sense that these women are carrying on, or in some cases beginning, something significant in their family traditions of which they are proud.

Positive examples of family influence may be noted in female familial relationships in which strong role models encourage growth and agency through empowerment. However, some families continue to purport the notion that a woman's role is to be supportive of men and children. In this regard, there is evidence that activists may be supported and nurtured by their NUT 'families'.

## **Conclusions**

In surmounting external difficulties which conspire to confuse the women teachers' sense of identity through the constant instability in teaching and education, the women teachers are systematically questioning, de-constructing and re-constructing their own narratives. By doing this they are discovering new identities through self-transformation and achieving a sense of 'becoming'. Being a teacher is at the heart of their identity and they believe that they can go some way to protect

their professional identity through their identity as activists. In both cases, there is evidence that the women teachers experience a sense of 'becoming' as they move forward.

It is evident that the women teachers enjoy the work they do as teachers and as activists and identify as both. However, they expend a great deal of emotional labour in each of these roles. Those who have retired continue to work as activists, transferring the skills they honed in their teaching careers to their substantive work. Some teachers find that the work they do as teachers can be perceived by others as conflicting with their roles as activists when in fact, each role is complementary and mutually reinforcing. These teachers believe that they can successfully identify as teachers and activists at the same time without causing conflict or harm. They believe that, in identifying with both, they can enhance each aspect of these identities and make a positive contribution to their profession.

Family influence plays a significant part in establishing both teacher and activist identities. A strong sense of fairness underpins the women's identity as teachers as well as activists. Some of the women cite the substantial family work ethic, coupled with a sequential commitment to trade unionism, as the foundation for their own identities as activists. Although families may not always understand or support the motivation of the women teachers, some of them have been nurtured by NUT colleagues to enable their activist identity to thrive. These colleagues may be considered as their 'NUT family'.

## **Summary**

This chapter has explored my interpretation of some of the main themes that have emerged from the data. The breakdown of the relationship between the profession and the government is a direct result of the introduction of the government's neo-liberal education agenda. The root of the breakdown between the profession and the government lies in the fact that teachers believe that children should be taught to be critical thinkers. Teachers believe that this runs contrary to the government's notion of education in so far as children should be enabled to pass standardised tests. Teachers' professional integrity and autonomy should be adhered to as they are well placed to make decisions on how to educate children. Strict accountability measures and high stakes testing are highlighted issues which show the chasm between the differing perceptions of professionalism advocated by the profession and the government.

There is evidence that some of the teachers have personally experienced instances of vulnerability brought about by negative feelings in the pursuit of professional satisfaction through emotional labour. Some teachers describe their negative feelings when faced with challenges to their personal identity and sense of self in the course of investing their emotional labour to support the institutional norms of their school. They describe how their own self-worth has been attacked at a basic level which resulted in disguising their true feelings and their own authenticity in order to fit in. Their pedagogical, moral and cultural caring, combined with their teaching of social justice, puts them in danger of highly emotional vulnerability, risking stress and burnout. These teachers report, however, that they have felt supported by their union when such incidents occurred.

There is also evidence amongst the women's stories of how the NUT has encouraged contributions from women teachers whose self-esteem was low and in need of transformational change. Through a series of pivotal moments of self-awareness and self-knowledge, negative assumptions are re-constructed which result in clarity and authenticity in perceptions of identity. Being part of the NUT allows the women teachers to be true to an authentic professional identity in so far as they are confident in participating in personal transformational change through continual self-awareness, to ensure they remain authentic in their beliefs and professional integrity. However, the hierarchy of the NUT can present difficulties to some of the women teachers, resulting in a lack of confidence and difficulties in fulfilling their potential as activists. Sometimes, the normative behaviours of the NUT can appear to be male-dominated, as exemplified through discussions on issues such as childcare and financial support, which can deter women from taking on active roles. The women teachers report how they and other women teachers perceive themselves to be already overburdened through roles and responsibilities outside of their professional life, which can deter them from taking on more emotional labour. Some women discuss how they were and are mothers, working as teachers and active in the NUT while also encouraged to take on more NUT responsibility. In attempting to protect themselves from the anxiety of workload overload, many women hesitate to become NUT activists, in spite of supporting the NUT ethos.

Although there is a strong sense of determination permeating the women's stories, showing how they continually seek to change adverse conditions for themselves and for others, it is sometimes their well-developed self-knowledge and self-awareness that drives them to make the ultimate change and leave the profession. Negative feelings due to changes in education policy have driven teachers to leave, sometimes through retirement, in spite of them achieving and sustaining success in the face of previous policy changes.

Leaving the profession, for some teachers, is, regrettably, the only course of action open to them to protect themselves against the negative feelings and danger of burnout they believe to be upon them, particularly if they have been engaged with lengthy stretches of emotional labour. There is also evidence that some teachers take time out from their NUT duties because of emotional overload. Their work as a teacher and their work as an activist have similar elements which can affect the amount of time and emotional labour they spend on each aspect, resulting in negative feelings.

On the whole, these women teachers exhibit a strong sense of self, both as teachers and activists, following the notion of the constant state of 'becoming', allowing for their identities to be constantly evolving through the discursive activities and communities in which they are involved. The women give a strong impression of feeling supported by other such activists and, in turn, engage with other women teachers to provide support and encouragement to empower them to take part. In becoming role models, other women teachers are enabled to undertake self-transformation through self-knowledge and self-awareness, creating new discourses for themselves. In this way, the women teachers and their colleagues may become confident agents of resistance. In recounting their narratives, teachers are able to regain control of their own dignity and sense of professionalism which has been destroyed. The women teacher activists enable vulnerable teachers to tell their stories and, in doing so, allow them to articulate a new pathway through the de-construction of former assumptions and the re-establishment of new ways to self-awareness and ultimately to resistance.

The next chapter is informed by the literature review chapters to present a discussion regarding the main themes that have arisen from the data in the context of the research questions. The concepts which have formed the basis of the literature review chapters – identity, teacher professionalism, professionalization and activism – have been considered, explicitly and implicitly, to maintain cohesion in the thesis. I will use the research questions as headings within the chapter and specify the aim of my thesis which is to discover, through the stories they tell, why women teachers stay in the profession and become trade union activists. Teachers identify closely with their profession and the emotional work they do, going beyond the remit of the curriculum and accountability measures to deliver a holistic education. Their activism is important to them and they continue to use the professionalism with which they identify as teachers to inform their activism. By doing this, teachers believe that they are making a positive difference to children's lives.

## **Chapter 8 – Discussion: Professionalism, activism and identity – in the context of the research questions**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is informed by the literature review and findings chapters to present a discussion regarding the main themes that have arisen from the data in the context of the research questions. I use the research questions as headings within this chapter and specify the aim of my thesis at the onset. The concepts which have formed the basis of the literature review chapters – teacher professionalism, professionalization, identity and activism – have been considered here, explicitly and implicitly, to maintain cohesion in the thesis. The themes of my findings relate to my research questions in a structural way.

The analysis of my thesis has been data-driven and the three main themes of perspectives of professionalism, activism and identity relate to three of the concepts which lead the four literature review chapters. I also expected the fourth concept of professionalisation to arise from the data, being one of the chapters in my literature review, which was not the case. The reason for this, I believe, is because, despite the women teachers discussing their fears that unqualified people could take over their work, in practice this was not a substantive issue for them. The reason for this is because the threat of de-professionalisation is not so much about the partnership of adults in the classroom, but more about the government's attempts to professionalise other areas of the education workforce in order to de-professionalise teaching. The data therefore show that the blame is on the government and not the unqualified staff.

Aim of the thesis - To discover, through the stories they tell, why women teachers stay in the profession and become trade union activists.

Main question - To what extent, if at all, do women teachers choose to become trade union activists?

Supporting questions

- What are women teachers' experiences of being and becoming trade union activists?
- How have policy changes to teaching shaped women teachers' trade union activism?

- Where are the potential barriers that women teachers face to become trade union activists?

## **8.1 Main question: To what extent, if at all, do women teachers choose to become trade union activists?**

### **8.1.1 Activism**

Teacher activism, defined by Picower (2012) as the 'commitments and practices' of teachers who 'help support other teachers', working 'collectively against oppression', is discussed here. The common thread featured is the need to challenge the neo-liberal ideology and reductionist discourses which have seized control of the teaching profession (Wood, 2014; Apple, 2013; Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Mausethagen and Granlund, 2012; Poole, 2007; Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Leaton Gray and Whitty, 2010). Ball (2003, in Clarke, 2013) advocates resistance against the 'terror of performativity', whilst Burke and Adler (2013) recognise activism as an act of caring in a landscape of increased accountability and marginalisation. The data show varying levels of activism amongst the women teachers, ranging from the role of national president – the highest level of executive in the NUT – to committee member of a local association. Some of the participants are retired from teaching but continue their activism in voluntary work for the Union, exemplifying the act of caring (Burke and Adler, 2013).

The extent to which the women teacher participants become activists is dependent upon the encouragement they are given from other activists, confirming insights from the literature, yet some of the women cite their own family members as the impetus to their activism, citing politics or religion as the critical driver. Although the literature states that for many women, the reason they first became active in the union is because of their attendance at a significant women-only or collective event (Kirton and Healy, 1999), this claim is not evident in the data.

Collective action has the potential to regain agency and resist the neo-liberal agenda (Hill, 2001), and according to Foucault (1980) and Zembylas (2003a), agency can only occur when power and resistance collide. Although the literature supports these particular data, there is a contrast between the data and the literature in detailing the struggles of some of the women to recruit other teachers in their school to become trade union members and take an active part in the union. Colleagues often fear institutional backlash if they do, particularly when teacher trade unions call for strike action. Strike action has always been a contentious issue



amongst workers (Boggs, 2009). Trade unionism and strike action do not necessarily go hand in hand, as many workers join a trade union solely for insurance purposes, in the event of them needing legal representation against allegations by an employer (Klandermans, 1986). Even when called to do so, not every member will take strike action (Boggs, 2009). The literature and the data synthesise here, as some women teachers report the lack of cooperation when trying to rally support for strike action. Although strike action appears to be a critical point at which trade union members decide upon the extent to which their activism will advance, the literature and data concur that continued trade union activism is important in order to ensure forward planning and future-proofing for trade unionism.

There is a sense of self-preservation in the data and the need to save the profession, citing 'an unpredictable future' for the profession and the need to 'fight back'. Some women teachers discuss the need to 'protect our profession' from what they perceive to be 'a political attack' on education. The data presents a fear that the government wants to destroy such trade union rights as national pay bargaining, and the women are fearful not only for the future of their profession but also for the nature of trade unionism. Some literature supports the notion that although teacher activism may have gained negative connotations from the past, resulting in an unwillingness to become active, teachers have a 'strong foundation' to develop as a strong activist force (Sachs, 2003, p9). Trade union activism amongst the teaching profession can be a relevant and potentially successful form of resistance against hegemonic government policy and education reform despite teachers' fears to the contrary (Sachs, 2003).

### **8.1.2 Family influence**

The influence of family commitment in terms of trade unionism has not been cited in the literature although there is evidence of the overwhelming significance of family involvement and influence in the data. Findings from this study indicate a strong sense of family involvement, particularly amongst matriarchs, who have encouraged and empowered their younger family members to follow them into the teaching profession and become activists in a trade union (see Section 7.4.3). By contrast, it is the men in Carol's family who encourage this path. It is implicit in the data that her father and grandfathers were members of trade unions. In an era when the patriarchy was dominant (Moore, 2000), Carol's trade union activism was slow to

emerge, yet her family stance influenced and guided her success in achieving the position of a national president in the NUT.

### **8.1.3 Institutional perspectives**

Institutional perspectives play a significant role in the extent to which the women teachers become trade union activists. Some teachers have described their activist roots as being planted in their school, particularly where trade union support was strong. Becoming a school representative (rep) for the NUT in school is a predominant feature of the data. Anna initially became a rep jointly with another colleague. She continued to be the school rep in her next school for 11 years. As a result of her leadership as a rep, membership increased, as did activism. Jenny became a rep because she had been working in what she describes as 'the role unofficially' due to the lack of commitment being shown by the official rep. Her colleagues asked her to take over the role as she had been instrumental in making positive changes to school life. Yasmin became a rep in her school as there was no rep there.

The role of the school rep is closely linked with the women's identities as teachers and as colleagues who can support others. The image of the school rep, a representative of the NUT in their own institution, is an important aspect of the identity of these women, though literature on this aspect of their identity is missing.

### **8.1.4 Early career teachers**

In order to preserve the teaching profession, early career and trainee teachers need to be nurtured into the Union. New teachers and trainee teachers begin to develop a sense of belonging to a 'community of practice' as their sense of professional identity increases (Woolhouse and Cochrane, 2015; Nias, 1989). Although initially early career teachers have little agency, as time goes on and confidence grows, they begin to question the structures and vocalise their concerns about the dominant discourses in education, asserting their agency (Reynolds in Day et al, 2006). It is during this period in their careers that some teachers decide to become active in teacher trade unionism in order to strengthen 'community of practice' ties with like-minded teachers.

Early career teachers benefit from the support of a strong mentor in their school in developing their professional identities (Woolhouse and Cochrane, 2015; Pearce and Morrison, 2011; Uitto et al, 2015; Morrison, 2013). In the same way, teachers

joining a teacher trade union benefit from mentoring support to develop their activism. Many of the participants, such as Anna, have styled themselves as mentors in their schools to encourage early career teachers in trade union activism. The data also show that some participants, such as Debbie and Lisa, have found encouragement from more experienced colleagues who have mentored them to encourage their potential trade union activism. The data and the literature both confirm the positive nature of mentoring in helping women teachers to become trade union activists, yet it does not go as far as to explore the nature of trade union mentoring once a teacher has become an activist.

In conclusion, the resistance of teachers to the current reforms is what drives their activism. Social justice and social activism are key components in the women teachers' narratives. There are varying levels of activism in terms of participation as well as the wide ranging roles the women take on within the NUT. Teachers are often encouraged to become active through the encouragement of other activists, but family encouragement has a very strong influence upon such a decision. Institutional perspectives play a significant role in the decision to become active, and the extent to which this occurs is dependent upon the extent to which the institution is 'unionised'. Although the literature cites the potential that teachers have to become a strong force to resist the hegemonic government reforms, teachers themselves do not adopt this stance. There is still a sense of the need for self-preservation. The literature affirms that teachers need to challenge and resist the government's neo-liberal ideology and reductionist discourses and take back control of the teaching profession.

## **8.2 What are women teachers' experiences of being and becoming trade union activists?**

### **8.2.1 Becoming a trade union activist**

There are many reasons why teachers decide to take an active role in trade unionism, particularly when they perceive unfairness in the execution of their work. Personal struggles, sometimes as far back as their own schooling, have prompted some teachers to become activists for social justice (Collay, 2010; Burke and Adler, 2013). Bukor (2015) argues that teacher identity is 'deeply embedded in one's biography' and therefore a holistic perspective needs to be taken into account. Yasmin exemplifies this as she presents her journey to becoming a teacher (see Section 7.3.1). Having secured childcare for her two children, Yasmin went on to become a teacher and a trade union activist. Findings from this study indicate that,

as an advocate for social justice, Yasmin's biography supports Bukor's (2015) statement (see Section 7.1).

Although the literature discusses the need for and success of strong mentoring for young and early career teachers (Woolhouse and Cochrane, 2015; Pearce and Morrison, 2011; Uitto et al, 2015; Morrison, 2013; Nias, 1989), there is no literature available which discusses the mentoring and nurturing of teacher trade union activists. Mentoring within the NUT has been favourable and produced long-lasting trade union activists. This can also be seen as the future-proofing of the past – a successful method which is still being repeated. Some of the women teachers felt on the periphery of education before she became involved with the NUT (see Section 7.3.1).

### **8.2.2 Being a trade union activist**

The literature states that teachers identify closely with their profession, resulting in highly charged feelings and emotions (Nias, 1996; Zembylas, 2003b; Hargreaves, 2005). The emotional work that teachers do is exemplified throughout the data, confirming the notion that teachers identify closely with their profession. Teachers such as Penny go beyond the boundaries of the classroom to enable education and learning in its fullest sense (see Section 7.2.1). By doing this, she is fulfilling the wider role of education, believing that children will benefit through early acquisition of speech and language skills, as well as improved behaviour. This is far above and beyond what is expected of a teacher with regard to curriculum responsibilities and the government's accountability agenda. Government policy, inspections, regulations and accountability are some of the factors with which teachers must engage, yet cannot control (Kelchtermans, 2009; Hutchings, 2015). Teachers like Penny go further in their commitment to the children they teach thus doing what they believe to be what is right for the holistic development of the children from their view of education as a whole. Despite teachers' voices being ignored by policy makers, teachers like Penny continue to advocate autonomy in this way (Connell, 2009; Hayes, 2011; Warwick, 2014; Swann et al, 2010).

Some of the women teachers' narratives exemplify the significant incidents which cause teachers to become trade union activists. Jenny's experience of the health and safety incident forced her to single-handedly raise the issue with her local NUT office to ask for help. Anna's mentor actually tried to dissuade her from joining the NUT, yet she believed that she needed to become active to retaliate against the unfairness of the cuts. However, findings from this study show that some women teachers struggle to maintain consistency

in their activism, particularly due to the overwhelming nature of the emotional labour involved (see Section 7.2.2). This is of particular concern when women teachers have the added factors of emotional labour of their teaching job and/or family commitments.

In contrast to the data, the literature does not recognise the experiences of teachers who have once been the national president of their union. This is a substantial gap in the literature, yet the data acknowledge significant issues here (see Section 7.3.3).

In conclusion, teachers identify closely with their profession and the emotional work they do, going beyond the remit of the curriculum and accountability measures to deliver a holistic education. By doing this, teachers believe that they are making a positive difference to children's lives. Mentoring and nurturing of teacher trade union activists is evident, at all levels of teaching experience, yet there is no mention of this phenomenon in the literature. Although family commitments may cause difficulties, activist colleagues are willing to mentor and enable those teachers who are interested and amenable to become involved, creating an NUT 'family'. There is evidence of some tensions and frustrations within the NUT at all levels of activism; the literature does not go as far as to discuss the nature of the higher level activist roles in this context.

### **8.3 How have policy changes to teaching shaped women teachers' trade union activism?**

#### **8.3.1 Teacher professionalism**

There are swathes of literature which discuss the impact of policy changes on teachers (see Section 2.2). However, there is both synergy and contrast in the data compared to the literature as to the extent of the impact. Rapid governmental reforms and continual policy changes have presented threats to teachers, particularly in the light of the National Curriculum introduced by the Thatcher government and recurring changes to it (Connell, 2009; Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). Parker (2015) argues that, since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1989, a whole cohort of teachers has been de-professionalised. The introduction of the National Curriculum (1989) and Ofsted inspections have been instrumental in causing trauma and self-doubt in teachers who had established their careers prior to this time (Wood and Jeffery, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2006).

Findings from this study indicate that teacher professionalism has been under threat for some time, due to the impact of accountability (see Section 7.2.1). Biesta's (2015) acknowledgement of the need for government, and subsequently

communities, to focus on the status of teaching in order to re-establish a forum for teachers' professional judgement is in line with the data. Teachers have been put in a position of confusion as governments have conspired to coerce teachers into becoming subservient to, and agents of, the state through the imposition of standards and high-stakes accountability (Beck, 2008). The introduction of management skills and language, and the neo-liberal marketisation of education, has had a negative impact on teachers (Connell, 2006; Sahlberg, 2012; Hayes, 2011). Teachers therefore struggle to maintain their professionalism in the wake of the changes. Some women teachers believe that a threat to the government's neo-liberal policy agenda is the likelihood that children could become critical thinkers if teachers veered from the strict high-stakes accountability agenda, which in itself is perceived as an act of resistance.

The dominant discourse, influenced by the neo-liberal education policy agenda, has become that of accountability, competency and consumerism, stripping away the teacher autonomy of the 1970s and 1980s and causing stress and concern to teachers' personal and professional lives (Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b; Goepel, 2012; Wilkins, 2011; Mockler, 2013). A strong sense of identity had been maintained in the profession since the introduction of the Plowden Report (1967) and the notion of the 'Secret Garden' (Parker, 2015) and the 'Golden Age' (Whitty, 2006). However, the neo-liberal policy agenda arrested the development of teachers' self-perception, causing their sense of vocation and professional status to be brought into question (Gray, 2006). Some long-serving teachers concur with the literature, recalling more stable times in education. The onset of the National Curriculum meant that some women teachers had to change their teaching, reacting to the needs of the National Curriculum and going on courses to facilitate distinct curriculum areas to be taught within their schools. These experiences confirm the statements made in the literature showing how teachers' identity has changed over the course of their careers. Teachers are now motivated by fear and have no autonomy.

Teacher identity changes as a teacher's career progresses. Often, in the context of structural or policy change, teachers who are in the latter stages of their career may hark back to better times because their current role may have become confusing and alienating (MacLure, 1993). Maureen does not explicitly hark back to better times, but she does exude a sense of feeling worn out by all the innovations she has had to maintain throughout her career. Brenda, in the latter stages of her career, discusses how she is perceived by the public, blaming the media for the denigration of the teaching profession, citing lack of respect and being undervalued

rather than being pitied as before because their job was so difficult. Brenda's observations as to how public perceptions have changed indicate that there has never been true autonomy for teachers, being pitied or ridiculed depending on the context of the times. There is no indication in the data that teachers were ever perceived in any but a negative way. The literature states that teachers' voices need to be taken into account by government policy makers as there is little evidence that teachers have been able to voice their opinions in the debate (Connell, 2009; Hayes, 2011; Warwick, 2014; Swann et al, 2010). This appears to be the case according to the data, despite teachers such as Penny being willing and able to voice their opinions as to the nature of education.

Sahlberg (2012) accuses the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) of spreading reductionist discourses which have resulted in the marketisation of education. To combat this threat and preserve the notion of teacher professionalism, organised teacher trade union groups have been instrumental in making a difference to enable teachers to preserve their professionalism (Apple, 2013; Osmond-Johnson, 2015; Poole, 2007; Mausethagen and Granlund, 2012). Professional unity would allow a stronger line of resistance (Apple, 2013), and a new kind of unionism may also be founded through broader alliances, such as with community groups, to further strengthen activism. However, the data from the participants present their own strength of feeling in the activism in which they participate. Although the data show awareness of the GERM and reductionist discourses, teachers such as Julie evidence their own strength in building resistance and fighting against the neo-liberal agenda, challenging the need for advice from external forces. Julie's use of terms such as 'polishing up my armour' and 'battle for education' indicate that she is building resilience, irrespective of the outcome of 'the fight'. She sees activism as a political phenomenon and also a means to the preservation of the teaching profession.

The rigorous testing and accountability measures have taken their toll on many teachers (Zembylas, 2005). Government policy and the requirements of policy in schools have had a detrimental effect on teachers' own reflective practices (Gatimu and Reynolds, 2013). Teachers have therefore become less confident in their own teaching as government policy and school management continually impact upon their daily lives (Reynolds in Day et al, 2006; Zembylas, 2005). Hult (2016) asserts that the negative working environment in which teachers have found themselves has resulted in a less creative curriculum delivery. Teachers who have engaged with critical theory have enhanced their pupils' learning, primarily through the use of

open-ended questioning and classroom discussions (Gatimu and Reynolds, 2013). Teachers in general are being worn down and have become time-poor and therefore find it difficult to make time to reflect on their teaching, yet findings from this study indicate that all the participants have presented succinct reflections on their own practice (see Section 7.2.1).

The data do not suggest that teachers are teaching less creatively. Teachers like Anna present a contrasting reality of critically aware teachers who are reflective practitioners. Indeed, some of the literature appears patronising to teachers, citing what they should and should not do and how they should behave in order to combat governmental policy changes. These teachers are not victims and do not need to be told what to do regarding their own reflective practice. Teachers may, in fact, feel worn out by having to adhere to more direction and academic advice as well as those from the government.

The women teachers are aware of and able to promote transformational change and agency, which is implicit in the data. Agency is an important factor which enables teachers to teach well. The process of actively changing institutional discourses can be instrumental in contributing towards transformational change (Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). This is affected by de-constructing the dominant reductionist discourses and re-constructing new discourses. Agency is also possible when criticism and disruption by teacher activists have become constructive when transformational change has been applied (Sannino, 2010). An example of the re-construction of discourses in the data may be seen where Anna cites the transformation of her fear of public speaking into a place of confidence that she has created where she feels able to speak on a subject about which she cares.

Both teachers and children have become frustrated by the testing regime, which compromises teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and compels them to inhibit their authentic beliefs and feelings. The women teachers report that their emotional wellbeing is damaged due to the pressure created by high stakes testing, allowing for what Zembylas cites as pedagogical, moral and cultural caring being compromised. In the wake of Ofsted inspections, some of the women teachers report success through the transformational changes which have occurred in their schools. Whilst working together in the collective, active transformational change has facilitated new discourses, allowing for ownership and a sense of inclusion, being valued and supported and being part of a whole. Teachers have been rewarded through the successful combination of emotional ecology and PCK, preserving their integrity and emotional wellbeing.



The subversive agenda of neo-liberal policy has re-contextualised teacher identity, facilitating the need to resist changes (Hall and McGinity, 2015). In spite of recognition for the positive contribution that teachers make, as acknowledged in the Green Paper (HMSO, 1998), teacher professionalism is still perceived by the government as an act of resistance in the context of performativity and economic rationalism (Bourke, 2015; Gillard, 2005). The issue of privatisation and marketisation as part of the neo-liberal agenda in education and the compulsion to conform (Hall and McGinity, 2015) is of great concern to the women teachers. Lack of control over their professional activity, situations and prospects is putting teachers' professional identity in crisis (Sadovnikova et al, 2016). The literature here supports the data.

Passion, dedication and commitment (Kim, 2013) are strong indicators of teacher identity amongst the participants I interviewed, as are the elements of motivation, efficacy, job satisfaction and effectiveness (Day, 2000). Teachers link their own notions of professionalism to a sense of vocation, their perspective on the curriculum and their own continued learning (Day et al, 2007; Warwick, 2014). However, external evaluations and government accountability have had a negative impact upon teachers' perceptions of their own professionalism (Hult, 2016). The assaults on teachers' autonomy, constant surveillance and pressure to perform have side-lined these qualities, leaving teachers feeling disempowered, lacking in confidence and lacking the respect and dignity that they once had (Kipps-Vaughan, 2013; Zembylas, 2005). Neo-liberal policies affect what Anderson and Cohen (2015) describe as 'new professionalism', which is a reaction to market-based reforms. The women I interviewed exhibited a desire to maintain their positive teacher identity, yet the struggle to deal with and overcome challenges remains in evidence. Bradbury (2012) endorses this point made by Penny, presenting a case for the scrapping of further accountability procedures for children below the age of five (see Section 7.2.1).

Teachers believe that they have the professional integrity, expertise and competence to be able to provide the best education for the children they teach without the need for excessive testing. Biesta (2015) argues that a teacher's professional judgement is paramount. Teachers can resist the neo-liberal policy agenda by identifying 'nomadic spaces' to build 'new opportunities for professionalism' (Wood, 2014). The instigation of social justice groups has also been suggested to resist and subvert the narratives of the state (Picower, 2012). Anna presents a place of safety which has evolved within the physical confines of

her school, as well as the intellectual spaces for what she describes as 'a very strong union group'.

Accountability measures are discussed in terms of new discourses which need to be in place to allow teachers' wellbeing to remain intact. When policy changes to accountability take place, it is the NUT women who enable other teachers in their schools to de-construct the discourses of what has gone before and re-construct new discourses to co-create a new path. These women show an acute awareness that colleagues who do not experience transformational change may experience vulnerability in their new circumstances which could lead to stress and burnout. Furthermore, these women clearly do not collude with new regimes, however strict they appear, through engaging with self-surveillance activities, but instead, they encourage openness and collegiality in their discussions to move forward, thus preserving professional integrity in themselves and encouraging the confidence to do the same in their colleagues.

The introduction of academies and free schools in England continued to epitomise the contempt in which the government held teachers. In Sweden, there had already been concerns about the nature of these for-profit, standards-driven free schools on which the English model would be based. Teachers in Swedish schools were conflicted due to the educational inequity, competitive school market, conflicting institutional and social ideals (Milner, 2015). All these aspects had a significant impact on teachers' professional identities. In England, academies and free schools were given a new legal status which enabled them, amongst other things, to opt out of the National Curriculum (Parker, 2015). Staff in these schools were allowed more autonomy than those in state schools (Everington, 2016), leading to division and unrest amongst the profession, as qualified and unqualified teachers worked alongside each other, leading to more teachers questioning their professionalism and roles in the new academies. Some women teachers cited the introduction of such initiatives and how privatisation has the potential to control our education system.

The media has, particularly in recent years, referred to the continued success of the Finnish education system, comparing this to the lower performance statistics of the UK. In Finland, teachers are treated with respect, their professional judgements take the place of testing and the curriculum is creative (Sahlberg, 2012). The literature resonates with the data here, seeing Penny as a strong advocate for the Finnish model of education. There have been attempts by recent UK governments to extract some of the elements of the Finnish education system in order to raise

education standards (see Section 2.3), yet the government's intention to apply aspects of the Finnish model was to impose tougher exams, tougher targets for schools and tougher discipline, rather than to provide support for an already struggling workforce (Sahlberg, 2012; Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010).

It is apparent that the data and the literature present a scene in which accountability is undermining teachers' sense of self as professionals. The data resonate with the literature which states that society and society's opinion of teachers impact greatly upon a teacher's sense of self (Day et al, 2006; Nias, 1996). The introduction of social accountability and consumerism has forced teachers to question their sense of purpose and professional identity (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010; Bruton, 2013; Zembylas, 2007; Gatimu and Reynolds, 2013). Teachers have, in recent years, become increasingly vulnerable, due to the increase in public scrutiny through the media, including social media (Hargreaves, 2000). The data wholeheartedly endorse these claims.

Hargreaves (2000) suggests that social media could work as an act of resistance, allowing teachers to re-establish their autonomy by enlisting the assistance of parents and communities. This claim is recognised by Julie who believes that social media is a way of allowing teachers to speak up, for people 'who haven't had a voice up until now'. The use of social media in rallying public support campaigns has been successful in some countries, such as Israel, where the media, primarily the internet, has been a highly successful instrument (Berkovich, 2011).

Teachers who have found that the changes to their profession have become too difficult to cope with often decide to exchange their skills and commitment to teaching children, and instead, they work for their trade union, in either a paid or unpaid capacity. This exemplifies the work of Zembylas (2005) and Kelchtermans (1996), who state that the 'professional self' evolves during a teacher's career and travels through stages of 'becoming'. Teachers need to be able to maintain a positive self-image and promote a healthy sense of professional identity which may be achieved through teaching-related work in their union. As feelings of increased vulnerability have escalated and the complex notions of teacher identity have led to teachers questioning their sense of purpose (Zembylas, 2003b), skilled staff have been welcomed into union recruitment to help increasing numbers of teachers in need. The teachers who participated in this research for whom this is relevant include Rose, Carol and Maureen who all work in some capacity for the NUT since

retiring, having exchanged their skills as teachers in the classroom for trade union work.

Autonomy, vocation and the ability to engage in their own learning emerge as key concepts in the women teachers' definition of professionalism. Teachers need to have agency to satisfy their professional needs and their passion to teach. The language of reductionist discourses and the blatant confrontational language of government discourses have alienated teachers who are motivated by fear despite the government perceiving teacher professionalism as an act of resistance.

### **8.3.2 The emotional cost**

The literature suggests that, as rapid changes that took place due to the National Agreement (DfES, 2003) and the subsequent Remodelling Agenda (Ofsted, 2005), coupled with the related bureaucracy and lack of consultation, teachers have experienced feelings of frustration, conflict, loneliness and ambivalence (Day et al, 2007; Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). Teachers have been demoralised by the impact of the reforms of the neo-liberal policy agenda for education, resulting in their hopes and aspirations in their careers being dashed (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010; Gunter and Rayner, 2007) (see Section 7.2.1). Ofsted inspections can typically invoke strong negative emotions, resulting in threats to teachers' mental health and wellbeing due to stress, anxiety, fear, guilt and shame (Day et al, 2006). The data resonates with the literature here.

The emotional burden and responsibility that has been placed upon teachers' shoulders has become a significant issue in recent years (Goldman, 1996; Greer, 2011; Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b). The sacrificial nature of teachers' work is never acknowledged by policy makers and the long-term nature of teachers having been overworked and stressed has been ignored (O'Connor, 2008; Moore and Clarke, 2016; Hutchings, 2015). Teachers have been noted for their high level of professionalism in concealing stress from the children they teach, yet they continue to care deeply for these children, endeavouring to give them the support they need (Hutchings, 2015; Cooper, 2004).

As a consequence of their emotional investment and the feelings of vulnerability that some teachers experience, the literature acknowledges that teaching is one of the most stressful occupations in the UK (Jepson and Forrest, 2006; Johnson et al, 2005; Spielberger, 2010). Work-related stress has been cited as a significant cause of high levels of sickness absence and mental health issues, as well as being

responsible for teachers leaving the profession (Illingworth, 2007; NUT, 2008; Jepson and Forrest, 2006; Johnson et al, 2005; Spielberger, 2010). Furthermore, teachers who are suffering from work-related stress have the added concern that their head teacher might use this information to influence selection criteria in determining candidates for redundancy, as, in spite of absence through long-term illness, a head teacher can still bring disciplinary procedures against that teacher if they believe that they are under-performing (Hebson et al, 2007). For some teachers, the data show that work-related stress is a significant concern, confirming what the literature states. In Section 7.2.1, Penny and Rose explain how they support teachers going through this by representing them in their capacity as NUT reps, while Jenny discusses her own experiences of work-related stress.

Teachers are also under pressure as a consequence of the government's austerity measures (Ridge, 2013; Smith, 2014). The impact of these measures has shown that children have been suffering as a direct consequence of the recession and subsequent austerity measures, resulting in child poverty and hunger, and causing major concerns about the children's wellbeing (Preston, 2008; Ridge, 2013). The data supports this premise as Penny discusses the demise of programmes such as Sure Start and children's centres which had contributed effectively to the wellbeing of young children.

### **8.3.3 Professionalisation**

The use of unqualified staff has been a constant source of tension to teachers, believing this initiative to be a threat to their professional status (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). The new role of the TA in particular, imposing greater responsibility, was seen as the thin end of the wedge in the de-professionalisation of teaching, eroding teachers' core responsibilities and competencies (Kirk and Wall, 2010; Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). As new 'associate professional' roles were established in the wake of the Green Paper (HMSO, 1998), incorporating 'cover supervisors', 'learning mentors' and 'parent support advisors', it was feared that the heart of teachers' work would be taken over by less qualified people (Edmond and Price, 2009).

The rewards and incentives that were put in place to alleviate the problem of excessive teacher workload have done little to solve the problem as they were never acknowledged by teachers as real solutions (Edmond and Price, 2009). Many of the incentives have indeed been perceived by teachers as threats, and tensions began to mount even before the documentation had been introduced (Hall and

Schultz, 2003). Teachers were devoting increasing amounts of time to administrative work rather than spending time with the children (Pupala et al, 2016). However, the extra numbers of support staff taken on to solve the problem of excessive teacher workload only fuelled the fear that TAs would systematically take over teachers' work and the division of labour (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). Findings from this study indicate that some of the experiences that teachers have had of working with support staff confirm what the literature states (See 7.2.1), particularly the fragmentation of teachers' roles in the wake of TAs taking over substantive work in the classroom. There is a sense of fear and the need for self-preservation as a profession.

Teamwork in the classroom was not as easy in practice as had been expected (Vincett et al, 2005), and the division of labour between teachers, TAs and HLTAs has caused teachers to find their work highly stressful (Graves, 2013; Stevenson, 2007). Early years teachers found difficulties in situations in which all workers who delivered the EYFS became known as practitioners, in spite of their individual roles (Simpson, 2010; Graves, 2014). Teacher in the Early Years were losing work in favour of poorly paid and untrained assistants (Galton and McBeath, 2010; Edmond and Price, 2009).

Further confusion arose as work boundaries were blurred due to the inclusion of other professionals being invited into Early Years settings, such as counsellors, mental health workers and social workers (Edmond and Price, 2009). Depending on the different circumstances that teachers are experiencing at any one time during their careers, teacher identities can be at once stable or fragmented (Zembylas, 2003b). The more changes that occur that are not in a teacher's control, these will result in greater incidents of fragmentation (Day et al, 2006). A significant change for supply teachers has been the issue of other adults taking over core work from teachers. By allowing other adults to take over teachers' work, teachers are parting with core work which cannot be retrieved (Gunter and Raynor, 2006).

The management and development of TA roles needed to be addressed in relation to their development needs (Butt and Lance, 2009; Rubie-Davies et al, 2010; Webster et al, 2013), particularly as children's learning was suffering as a result of direct TA intervention (Webster et al, 2011; Webster et al, 2013; Butt and Lance, 2009; Rubie-Davies et al, 2010; Cremin et al, 2005; Wilson and Bedford, 2008). Jones (2004) warns that inequality in education systems may harm the ability of the learner to acquire necessary skills. The NUT also feared the impact of the lowering

of professional standards in using HLTAs and cover supervisors in place of supply teachers (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010; Leaton-Gray and Whitty, 2010). Tensions arise as a result of the continually changing nature of teacher professionalism which is due essentially to the constant challenges that occur through both internal and external forces, as well as role ambiguity as a fundamental issue in the demarcation of work (Sachs, 2015; Edmond and Hayler, 2013).

Although the women teachers have voiced their fears regarding the implementation of support staff, findings from this study show that it is not the actual presence of support staff in the classroom that is the most contentious issue, but the government's attempts to professionalise other areas of the education workforce in order to de-professionalise the teaching profession (see Section 7.2.1). The data clearly show that the blame for the de-professionalisation of the teaching profession sits squarely with the government.

In conclusion, the rapid changes caused by the neo-liberal government policy agenda have created a negative effect on teachers. Teachers are now motivated by fear and have no autonomy. Whilst fostering frustration and conflict, trauma and self-doubt, the changes to policy have also bred resistance and subsequent activism. The consequence of this activism is that the profession is building resilience. The emotional investment that teachers make in their work has caused them to be overworked and stressed as the changes have occurred. The emotional burden has caused their mental health to suffer and created work-related stress in many cases. Notwithstanding, teachers still try and conceal their stress levels from the pupils they teach. Teachers are also under pressure due to austerity measures. However, in a bid to alleviate the pressures of the job, teachers are de-constructing reductionist discourses and re-constructing their own agenda, especially through what they consider to be safe spaces, for example, in a 'unionised' school.

Public perceptions indicate that there has never been true autonomy for teachers. They have historically been pitied or ridiculed depending on the context of the times. There is no indication in the data that teachers were ever perceived in any way other than negatively. It has been suggested that teachers may be given a voice through social media, thus turning the use of social media into an act of resistance as opposed to a weapon to denigrate the teaching profession. Although academics claim to represent teachers, supporting them in their struggles,

universities who believe they are representing teachers also have an agenda of their own.

The marketisation and privatisation of education have caused confusion as the dominant discourse of accountability continues to wreak havoc. However, as the GERM has become documented, teachers have begun to form alliances of resistance against it. Teacher professionalism is perceived by the government as an act of resistance in itself. In comparing the education system in England to its Finnish counterpart, it is evident that the teachers and the government in Finland share a mutual respect that is lacking in England.

The threat of unqualified staff taking over teachers' work is a contentious issue. There is evidence that some teachers have resorted to working as TAs in order to obtain work in the wake of supply teaching being cut in favour of cheaper staff running the classroom. Although the women teachers have voiced their fears regarding the implementation of support staff, it is not the actual presence of support staff in the classroom that is the most contentious issue, but the government's attempts to professionalise other areas of the education workforce in order to de-professionalise the teaching profession (see Section 7.2.1). The data clearly show that the blame for the de-professionalisation of the teaching profession sits squarely with the government.

Autonomy, vocation and the ability to engage in their own learning emerge as key concepts in the women teachers' definition of professionalism. Teachers need to have agency to satisfy their professional needs and their passion to teach. The language of reductionist discourses and the blatant confrontational language of government discourses have alienated teachers who are motivated by fear despite the government perceiving teacher professionalism as an act of resistance.

## **8.4 Where are the potential barriers that women teachers face to become trade union activists?**

### **8.4.1 Family matters**

The most common indication of potential barriers to the participants' trade union activism concerns family. Many of the women teachers discuss the struggles they experience in making sure that the needs of the family are addressed before committing to trade union activities. Some of the women presume that, due to their own circumstances, other women teachers with family commitments may also be



unable to commit to trade union duties. There is a tremendous sense of feelings of guilt in the data due to the physical absence of these women, citing their role as wife, mother or daughter to indicate the notion of responsibility they are expected to execute for others. Family barriers are more significant to these women particularly in the early days of their trade union activism, until they become more involved in trade unionism and families become more used to the situation (see Section 7.4.3).

#### **8.4.2 The role of mothers**

The notion of motherhood as a barrier is significant in the literature as well as the data with which it resonates. The cost of caring as a teacher and investing emotionally is a high price to pay, yet paradoxically, it is resistance to the current reforms that drives teachers (O'Connor, 2008). Arguments have been presented on many occasions to condemn teaching as a feminised profession, perpetuating the stereotypical notion that caring and mothering skills are necessary in the primary classroom (Connell, 2009; Murray, 2006; Thornton and Brickeno, 2006). Although the data shows that the women struggle to maintain their 'mothering' at the same time as their trade union activism, this does not support the claim that their mothering skills are necessary in a primary classroom. In spite of being mothers of young children, as well as a serving teacher, many of the women explain how their activism continued nonetheless (see Section 7.4.3). Some discuss feelings of guilt for leaving family behind when they embark upon NUT business, while others find ways to include their children, particularly on marches or strikes. This inclusive model is one that is used in an attempt to break down potential barriers to trade union activism and encourage other women teachers to become active in their unions. However, the women teachers are mindful that children are a responsibility to consider when embarking upon trade union activism.

In deliberately blurring the concepts of the 'good mother' and the 'good teacher', the government has wrongly cast women primary and Early Years teachers in the role of carers and nurturers of young children instead of valuing them as competent, highly educated professionals (Connell, 2009; Acker in Connell, 2009; Murray, 2006). The role of women in teaching and Early Years education is a high priority for the women teachers who believe that the NUT should focus more on this sector. They are also concerned about government attitudes and derogatory discourses regarding the teaching of younger children, as well as the NUT's negligence of primary and Early Years educators. Kim (2013) explores the attitudes of women who teach in the Early Years, discovering that they feel their professional training

has been tainted due to public perceptions of them as babysitters, in spite of their high level of education and professionalism. The expectation is also that they should accept low pay. The data confirm this idea of women teachers in the Early Years as being sidelined which resonates with the literature.

#### **8.4.3 The role of men**

The data show that women teachers, who account for 82% of the profession, are not allowing some of the potential barriers to becoming trade union activists deter them, particularly in the light of male domination in leadership positions in the profession. The literature confirms the position of the domination of men, not only in teaching, but in the trade union movement. Women teachers have exceeded the numbers of male teachers for many years, yet it is in the interest of the male-dominated state to exploit women (Marx in Jones, 2004; Vickery, 2015). The economic gulf, together with the persistent hegemonic masculine discourse of superiority, continues to fuel the narrative of the exploitation of women. Those in power will always endeavour to maintain the social order (Jones, 2004). However, women have refused to be satisfied with this state of being and continue to resist exploitation (Davis, 2011).

Women's status in trade unionism has not been easily secured, their membership being lower than men's (Sinclair, 1993; Holloway in Davis, 2011). This has also been reflected in the teaching profession, in spite of the fact that women have constituted the majority of teachers since the latter part of the nineteenth century (Gilroy, 1999). The women teachers discuss specific incidents of male defiance and reluctance to include women in decision making in their union which wholeheartedly resonates with the literature. These women teachers show that they will not allow a male dominated culture to become a barrier to their trade union activism.

Women have not been a visible part of British labour history, as they have constituted the majority of oppressed groups by predominantly white males (Davis, 2011). Historically, the work undertaken by women has not been recognised with the same level of importance as men's work, nor had women been paid equally to men for the same work (Beechey, 1987). The notion of the male as the wage earner perpetuated the myth that this was the natural state and expectation of the order of society. It exacerbated women's dependency on men, fostering the unequal state that existed between them. According to Moore (2000), women have been exploited and dominated within a patriarchal, capitalist society and continue to be so. Acts of resistance against oppression have been witnessed in history, and remain on

women's agenda today, often resulting in favourable outcomes (Macguire, 2013; Swerdlow, 1993).

In conclusion, family is a significant factor when navigating barriers to trade union activism. Some women focus on the guilt they feel when they are not able to service their family's needs, whilst others go as far as to include their children when executing NUT work. Family issues can perpetuate the myth of teaching as being a feminised profession, especially in confusing the notion of a 'good teacher' with the notion of a 'good mother'. Yet the emotional cost of caring is huge, especially when the caring may be focused on three aspects at one time, they being teaching, activism and family. Caring for the family combined with caring as a teacher is already a huge undertaking, but the added nature of activism is an extra entity which may also take its toll in caring.

Early Years teaching is still not given the respect and attention it deserves, the reason for which is generally considered to be because women dominate the sector. Despite women constituting the majority of the teaching profession and NUT members, it is unusual to have women taking up leadership roles. There are still signs of a male-dominated culture which engenders rivalry and competition within the NUT. The representation of women in the NUT is still an issue of concern.

## **Summary**

This chapter has interrogated the literature review and findings chapters to present a discussion regarding the main themes that have arisen from the data in the context of the research questions. The concepts which have formed the basis of the literature review chapters – identity, teacher professionalism, professionalization and activism – have been considered here, explicitly and implicitly, to maintain cohesion in the thesis. The themes of my findings relate to my research questions in a structural way.

The analysis of my thesis has been data-driven and the three main themes of perspectives of professionalism, activism and identity relate to three of the concepts which lead the four literature review chapters. The fourth concept of professionalisation was not so significant in the data because, I believe, that despite fears that unqualified people could take over teachers' work, the threat of de-professionalisation is not so much about the partnership of adults in the classroom, but more about the government's attempts to professionalise other areas of the

education workforce in order to de-professionalise teaching. The data therefore show that the blame is on the government and not the unqualified staff.

The resistance of teachers to the current reforms is what drives them to activism. Social justice and social activism are key concepts in the women teachers' narratives. There are varying levels of activism in terms of participation cited in the wide ranging roles the women take on within the NUT. Teachers are often encouraged to become active through the encouragement of other activists, but family encouragement has a very strong influence upon such a decision. Institutional perspectives play a significant role in the decision to become active, and the extent to which this occurs is dependent upon the extent to which the institution is 'unionised'. Although the literature cites the potential that teachers have to become a strong force to resist the hegemonic government reforms, there is still a sense of the need for self-preservation to subsequently preserve the profession as a whole. The literature affirms that teachers need to challenge and resist the government's neo-liberal ideology and reductionist discourses and take back control of the teaching profession.

Teachers identify closely with their profession and the emotional work they do, going beyond the remit of the curriculum and accountability measures to deliver a holistic education. By doing this, teachers believe that they are making a positive difference to children's lives. Mentoring and nurturing of teacher trade union activists is evident, at all levels of teaching experience, yet there is no mention of this phenomenon in the literature. Although family commitments may cause difficulties, activist colleagues are willing to enable those teachers who are interested and amenable to become involved in activism. There is evidence of some tensions and frustrations within the NUT at all levels of activism; the literature does not go as far as to discuss the nature of the higher level activist roles in this context.

The rapid changes caused by the neo-liberal government policy agenda have created a negative effect on teachers. Teachers are now motivated by fear and have no autonomy. Whilst fostering frustration and conflict, trauma and self-doubt, the changes to policy have also bred resistance and subsequent resilience. The emotional investment that teachers make in their work has caused them to be overworked and stressed as the changes have occurred. The emotional burden has caused their mental health to suffer and created work-related stress in many cases. Notwithstanding, teachers still try and conceal their stress levels from the pupils they teach. Teachers are also under pressure due to austerity measures. However,

in a bid to alleviate the pressures of the job, teachers are de-constructing reductionist discourses and re-constructing their own agenda, especially through what they consider to be safe spaces, for example, in a 'unionised' school.

The marketisation and privatisation of education have caused confusion as the dominant discourse of accountability continues to wreak havoc. However, as the GERM has become documented, teachers have begun to form alliances of resistance against it. Teacher professionalism is perceived by the government as an act of resistance in itself. In comparing the education system in England to its Finnish counterpart, it is evident that the teachers and the government in Finland share a mutual respect that is lacking in England.

Both teachers and children have become frustrated by the testing regime, which compromises teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and compels them to inhibit their authentic beliefs and feelings. Teachers' emotional wellbeing is damaged due to the pressure created by high stakes testing, allowing for what Zembylas cites as pedagogical, moral and cultural caring being compromised. In the wake of Ofsted inspections, success through the transformational change can occur. Active transformational change can facilitate new discourses, allowing for ownership and a sense of inclusion. Teachers have been rewarded through the successful combination of emotional ecology and PCK, preserving their integrity and emotional wellbeing.

The threat of unqualified staff taking over teachers' work is a contentious issue. There is evidence that some teachers have resorted to working as TAs in order to obtain work in the wake of supply teaching being cut in favour of cheaper staff running the classroom. It has been suggested that teachers may be given a voice through social media, thus turning the use of social media into an act of resistance as opposed to a weapon to denigrate the teaching profession.

Some women focus on the guilt they feel if they are not able to service their family's needs, whilst others go as far as to include their children when executing NUT work. Family issues can perpetuate the myth of teaching being a feminised profession, especially in confusing the notion of a 'good teacher' with the notion of a 'good mother'. Yet the emotional cost of caring is huge, especially when the caring may be focused on three aspects at one time, they being teaching, activism and family. Caring for the family combined with caring as a teacher is already a huge undertaking, but the added nature of activism is an extra entity which may also take its toll in caring.

Early Years teaching is still not given the respect and attention it deserves, the reason for which is generally considered to be because women dominate the sector. Despite women constituting the majority of the teaching profession and NUT members, it is unusual to have women taking up leading roles as branch officers. There are still signs of a male-dominated culture in which engenders rivalry and competition within the NUT. The representation of women in the NUT is still an issue of concern.

Public perceptions indicate that there has never been true autonomy for teachers. They have historically been pitied or ridiculed depending on the context of the times. There is no indication in the data that teachers were ever perceived in any way other than negatively. Although academics claim to represent teachers, supporting them in their struggles, universities who believe they are representing teachers also have an agenda of their own.

Autonomy, vocation and the ability to engage in their own learning emerge as key concepts in the women teachers' definition of professionalism. Teachers need to have agency to satisfy their professional needs and their passion to teach. The language of reductionist discourses and the blatant confrontational language of government discourses have alienated teachers who are motivated by fear despite the government perceiving teacher professionalism as an act of resistance.

In the next chapter I provide conclusions to my thesis to explain why the research was carried out which was to fulfil the aim of my thesis, which is to discover, through the stories they tell, why women teachers stay in the profession and become trade union activists. I also provide recommendations for further research and discuss the limitations of the research I have undertaken in this study. Most importantly, I present what I believe to be my original contribution to the field of knowledge.

## **Chapter 9 – Conclusions, recommendations and limitations**

### **Introduction**

This research was carried out to fulfil the aim of my thesis, which is to discover, through the stories they tell, why women teachers stay in the profession and become trade union activists. I provide conclusions to my thesis to explain why the research was carried out and I also provide recommendations for further research and discuss the limitations of the research I have undertaken in this study. Most importantly, I present what I believe to be my original contribution to the field of knowledge.

### **9.1 Conclusions**

My research demonstrates that the relationship between teachers and the government is strained. The government reforms had the potential to foster positive outcomes and enhance teaching and learning, but due to the absence of agreed intentions between the government and teachers, there is no opportunity for teachers to show their professional competence. Although teachers are in a strong position being on the frontline of teaching in the classroom on a daily basis, the oppressive nature of the government education reform agenda has removed this advantage through their neo-liberal attitudes and behaviour. Teacher professionalism is perceived by the government as an act of resistance in itself. In comparing the education system in England to its Finnish counterpart, it is evident that the teachers and the government in Finland share a mutual respect that is lacking in England.

The threat of de-professionalisation causes teachers to become involved in acts of resistance. The power of solidarity against the neo-liberal education agenda provides a strong stance which is empowering to teachers locally and globally. A central aim of my thesis, which is to privilege teacher voice, demonstrates how government policy has influenced teachers' perceptions, causing many to reconsider their place in the profession. Government neo-liberal policy changes have impacted upon teacher autonomy and previously acknowledged perceptions of professionalism. As the marketisation and privatisation of education cause confusion with the dominant discourse of accountability, teachers form global alliances of resistance against the GERM. Teachers also use social media as a voice of resistance which can neutralise the use of social media as a weapon to denigrate the teaching profession.

Teachers identify closely with their profession and the emotional work they do, often going beyond the remit of the curriculum and accountability measures to deliver a holistic education. By doing this, teachers believe that they are making a positive difference to children's lives. In exploring the factors which shape teachers' identity and sense of self, the impact of government policy and the emotional work of teaching indicate significant changes to teachers' roles and their understanding of the concept of professional identity. The challenges facing some teachers in relation to the perspectives on teacher identity may be resolved through continued professional development which can be restorative. Identity can be a difficult concept for early career teachers as they begin to identify with their profession. Transformational change and identity re-construction can enable the development of new teachers, particularly in the light of the emotional work of teaching and the impact of government policy on the profession. A form of collective identity, both in school and as a member of a union, is helpful for early career teachers as they navigate government perspectives on the social context and factors contributing towards the negative emotions experienced by teachers regarding the emotional investments in their work.

The rapid changes caused by the neo-liberal government policy agenda create a negative effect on teachers. Whilst fostering frustration and conflict, trauma and self-doubt, the changes to policy have bred resistance whilst also building resilience. The emotional investment that teachers make in their work causes them to be overworked and stressed. The emotional burden causes their mental health to suffer and causes work-related stress in many cases. Notwithstanding, teachers still try and conceal their stress levels from the pupils they teach. Teachers are also under pressure due to austerity measures. However, in a bid to alleviate the pressures of the job, teachers are de-constructing reductionist discourses and re-constructing their own agenda, especially through what they consider to be safe spaces, for example, a 'unionised' school.

The professionalisation of support staff in schools has had a detrimental effect upon teachers' work and their sense of professionalism. The work of support staff has been formalised to comply with government standards, which enables them to be measured and controlled. TAs have taken over teachers' substantive work, the outcome of which is the reduction in teachers' jobs, particularly for supply teachers. The threat of unqualified staff taking over teachers' work is a contentious issue. Some teachers resort to working as TAs in order to obtain work in the wake of supply teaching being cut in favour of cheaper staff running the classroom. Yet it is



not so much the partnership in the classroom that poses a significant threat to teachers but the government's attempts to de-professionalise teaching through the creation of new professionalised posts within the education workforce.

Teacher workload has increased as a result of having to prepare work for TAs to deliver to pupils in their place. Children's learning is suffering as a consequence of lessons delivered by support staff who are not adequately trained in behaviour management techniques and subject knowledge. In spite of poor quality lesson delivery by TAs, teachers are ultimately responsible for high stakes accountability. Support staff are not given the training they were promised leaving them feeling unable to assist teachers and children appropriately themselves. As teachers and support staff work in teams, particularly in Early Years settings, the confusion over their titles and roles, and the lack of demarcation of work causes the division of labour to be blurred.

Activism occurs at varying levels in terms of participation, though it is evident in the data that women take on a wide ranging variety of roles within the NUT. Teachers are often encouraged to become active through the support and advocacy of other activists, but family encouragement has a very strong influence upon such a decision. Although, conversely, family commitments may cause difficulties and become barriers to activism, activist colleagues are willing to enable those teachers who are interested and amenable to become involved. This creates what can be perceived as an NUT 'family'. Some women focus on the guilt they feel if they are not able to service their family's needs, whilst others go as far as to include their children when executing NUT work. Family issues can perpetuate the myth of teaching being a feminised profession, especially in confusing the notion of a 'good teacher' with the notion of a 'good mother'. Yet the emotional cost of caring is huge, especially when the caring may be focused on three aspects at one time, these being teaching, activism and family. Caring for the family combined with caring as a teacher is already a huge undertaking, but the added nature of activism is an extra entity which may also take its toll in caring.

Institutional perspectives play a significant role in the decision to become active, and the extent to which this occurs is dependent upon the extent to which the institution is 'unionised'. Although the literature cites the potential that teachers have to become a strong force to resist the hegemonic government reforms, there is still a sense that the primary need for activism is in relation to self-preservation.

Mentoring and nurturing of teacher trade union activists is evident, at all levels of

teaching experience. There is evidence of some tensions and frustrations within the NUT at all levels of activism.

Early Years teaching is still not given the respect it deserves, the reason for which is generally considered to be because women dominate the sector. Despite women constituting the majority of the teaching profession and NUT members, it is unusual to have women taking up leading roles at branch officer level. There are still signs of a male-dominated culture which engenders rivalry and competition within the NUT. The proportional representation of women in the NUT is still an issue of concern.

The literature affirms that teachers need to challenge and resist the government's neo-liberal ideology and reductionist discourses and take back control of the teaching profession. Teachers and the government need to mend their antagonistic relationship and begin to work together for the good of children and education as a whole, possibly using the Finnish model as a starting point. Teachers need to be consulted by the government on policy content, and the outcomes for education need to be discussed with respect and courtesy, which would foster long-term benefits for teaching and learning.

My research recommends that the negative attitudes to teacher trade unionism and activism need to change, as activism is making a positive contribution to education. The women teachers I interviewed are making a positive contribution to the teaching profession through activism. They are proud of their union and they are building resilience.

## **9.2 Observations, new information and opinions**

Zembylas (2003a, 2003b, 2005) has discussed the nature of transformational change in the context of teachers and teaching, yet his research does not go as far as to acknowledge trade unionism as a vehicle for transformational change. Trade unionism is cited in this research as a major aspect of participants' lives which allows them to resist the current educational reforms which they believe to be detrimental to the work of teaching and the children they teach. It is this resistance that drives them to activism. Furthermore, the participants demonstrate that activism is a means for sustaining the teaching profession as well as the professional identity of teachers. According to the narratives of some of the participants, transformational change is not only possible through discourses and in

terms of the collective; it is also possible to achieve transformational change within one's own self.

The de-professionalisation of teaching is not so much about the partnership with unqualified people at classroom level, but more about the attempts made by government to professionalise other areas of the education workforce which have led to the de-professionalisation of teaching. Through the narratives of some of the participants, it can be noted that teachers and non-teaching staff have and can coexist harmoniously in the pursuit of high quality teaching and learning for the children in their care. However, according to some participants and some of the literature (eg Payler and Locke, 2013), the professionalization of non-teaching staff has changed attitudes of both teaching and non-teaching staff, resulting in difficulties in enabling high quality teaching and learning. It would appear that the government have misunderstood the needs and articulations of teachers and have pursued educational reforms that have been ill-conceived.

This research presents the participants' feelings regarding the lack of professional autonomy as situated in the current climate of the neo-liberal educational reforms. However, it has also been noted that there has never actually been a time of teacher autonomy, only the perception of teacher autonomy. There have always been tensions between teachers and the government to some degree. In responding to the notion that teachers need help in resisting the restrictions imposed by the government, there has been a great deal of research conducted by academics for the purpose of bringing about change to the neo-liberal education reform agenda. However, it should be remembered, with caution, that universities and academics who claim to represent teachers by challenging the government also have an agenda of their own. Teachers and academics need to be able to work together, with clarity and openness, to provide an authentic platform from which to articulate and address mutual concerns. Teachers need to be able to trust academics to approach their situation with sincerity and empathy, to collaborate as equals, genuinely supporting research into practice in an ever increasingly complex environment despite the prevailing discourse in academia of maximising research outputs to enhance career progression.

### **9.3 Original contribution to existing knowledge, limitations and recommendations for further research**

My thesis was initially informed by the work of Osmond-Johnson (2015), who undertook research with teachers from a teachers' union in Alberta, with the

intention of using this consultation to support the teachers. Although it is widely asserted that a universally accepted definition of teacher professionalism is not possible, I explored the definitions and associated work of other researchers to ascertain the most closely related research to my own. Coulter and Orme (2000) suggest that defining teacher professionalism needs to take in the 'moral dimensions of teaching' and the 'fundamental democratic character of education'. Biesta (2015) advocates the re-establishment of a forum for teachers' professional judgement. Evans (2014, 2015) defines professionalism as something a person does in the context of their work, rather than a term reserved exclusively for the 'classic' professions of law, medicine and the church. Vu (2016) defines teacher professionalism as a 'kaleidoscope' creating different representations of values, virtues and political dimensions. In discussing professional constructs, Bair (2016) cites the notion of professionalism in teaching as 'restrictive'. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) (in Parker, 2015) defines teacher professionalism as 'exercising judgement on the curriculum' (p454).

While all of these perspectives on teacher professionalism have some validity none provided a suitable match with the focus of my research since they seemed rather abstract and often nebulous while being derived from an external point of view. The definition provided by Osmond- Johnson (2015) allowed for a more concrete starting point for my research. In addition, this consultation offered an opportunity to relate to my own research as both involve interviews with teacher trade unionists. Osmond-Johnson's work suggests that the chaotic nature of the neo-liberal education reforms globally is so damaging that another route is necessary to bring about change. This notion also fitted well with Zembylas's work on transformational change which I have cited throughout my thesis.

Having conducted an extensive literature search, it seems that there is little if any literature available which has afforded women teachers the opportunity to explain why they continue to give their time, energy and commitment to activism within a profession characterised by often rapid 'root and branch' change which is - in itself - demanding of time, energy and commitment. The major contribution of this research is – first and foremost - to give voice to these women teacher activists. In some ways my own positionality as researcher has been influenced by the fact that I myself am a woman, a teacher and a trade union activist. As the researcher I have therefore felt a certain empathy with my participants and an abiding sense of responsibility to articulate their stories with authenticity. My positionality has supported the development of a strong relationship of trust which has allowed

participants to feel comfortable in sharing their stories and the often very powerful emotions which underlie them.

Having conducted this research it is possible to identify a number of specific areas which should be explored in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of why women teachers choose to become trade union activists. Firstly, the literature which discusses trade union activism provides little insight into the influence of family commitment upon trade union activism. In contrast, the research presented here cites politics or religion as crucial drivers within the family on significantly influencing those women teachers who decide to become trade union activists. Furthermore, the literature fails to consider in any depth the nature of the higher level activist roles in the context of trade unionism, such as the national president. The research presented in this thesis explores the essence of these roles and indicates how the various successes and conflicts that may occur as a result of attaining high office influence the sense of self and professional relationships but further research in this area is required.

At the other end of the scale the role of the school trade union representative (rep) and the impact upon her identity and sense of self is not covered in the literature. The research presented here shows how the role of a school rep may be compromised as she becomes caught between the discourses of the school policies and her trade union work. This in turn can create inner conflict for the rep trying to execute her work of teaching, whilst being true to her trade union principles. While acknowledging this phenomenon further research would be beneficial.

Particularly in relation to early career teachers, while mentoring and nurturing are featured in the literature, there is a gap regarding the mentoring and nurturing of teacher trade union activists. This research suggests that at all levels of teaching experience there is a need for research to explore this phenomenon.

While the research presented here has contributed to knowledge in the field (as suggested above) it is useful to note one or two issues going forward. Firstly, at times, it has been difficult to work with the literature because of the need to try to distance oneself from the often confrontational rhetoric of some of the work in the field. Of course the research presented in the literature may well have legitimacy but the need to apply skills of critical literacy has been essential to rising above the rhetoric and trying to maintain a level of impartiality. It may also be considered that the number of participants I interviewed could be increased from 11 to a greater

number to facilitate a wider range of experiences and opinions, although this would need to be balanced against the desire for authenticity in providing a platform for teachers to tell their stories. Having said that, one particular group is not represented in this research - early career teachers. Certainly, the insights gleaned from this research provide the foundation for further investigation of the narratives of women in this particular group.

Finally, on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017, the NUT and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) amalgamated to form a new union, namely the National Education Union (NEU). In the light of this new union, it could be advantageous to conduct research which invites participants to provide narratives regarding their motivation for activism, particularly since members of this new union constitute support staff as well as qualified teachers.

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## **Abbreviations**

AAA	Anti Academies Alliance
APP	Assessing Pupil Progress
AST	Advanced Skills Teacher
ATA	Alberta Teachers' Association
ATL	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
BCTF	British Columbia Teachers' Federation
BEd	Bachelor of Education
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BME	Black Minority Ethnic
BT	British Telecom
CATE	Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education
CPD	Continued Professional Development
CTU	Chicago Teachers' Union
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DFES	Department For Education and Science
DISS	Deployment and Impact of Support Staff
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYFSP	Early Years Foundation Stage Profile
EYP	Early Years Practitioner
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status

EYT	Early Years Teacher
GERM	Global Education Reform Movement
GMB	General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union
GTC	General Teaching Council (in England)
GTP	Graduate Teacher Programme
HE	Higher Education
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching Assistant
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
HMCI	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
HQ	Head Quarters
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
KS1	Key Stage One
KS2	Key Stage Two
KS3	Key Stage Three
LA	Local Authority
LGBT	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender
LH	Life History
MP	Member of Parliament
MTL	Masters in Teaching and Learning
NAHT	National Association of Head Teachers
NASUWT	National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership

NCWGB	National Council for Women in Great Britain
NEU	National Education Union
NFWW	National Federation of Women Workers
NI	Narrative Inquiry
NNEB	Nursery Nursing Examinations Board
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
NUT	National Union of Teachers
NUET	National Union of Elementary Teachers
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate of Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPA	Planning, Preparation and Assessment
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
RAF	Royal Air Force
SATs	Standard Attainment Tasks
SCITT	School Centred Initial Teacher Training
SEF	Self Evaluation Form
SEN	Special Educational Needs
TA	Teaching Assistant
TBF	Teachers' Benevolent Fund



TDA	Teaching Development Agency for Schools
TINA	There Is No Alternative
TSN	Teacher Support Network
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UEN	Union of Education Norway
USA	United States of America
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Role and structure of the NUT**

The following information is taken from the NUT website,  
<https://www.teachers.org.uk/node/739> (accessed 18<sup>th</sup> October 2015):

#### **National Union of Teachers: Role and Structure**

The NUT organises teachers in England, Wales, the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey and in Service Children's Schools throughout the world. As by far the largest teachers' union, the NUT has the resources and staffing to meet the needs of teachers in all aspects of their professional work. The Union's structure at headquarters, in the English regions and in Wales is designed to meet the needs of all teachers, including headteachers, deputy headteachers, supply teachers and part-time teachers, all of whom may require professional support, advice and guidance at some stage.

As the major professional organisation, the NUT plays a leading role in influencing education and employment policies at national and local levels. The Union is represented on major national educational bodies. At local level NUT representatives participate in the various policy-making, negotiating and consultative bodies. The Union makes representations to central government on all matters affecting the contracts of teachers and schools. Through its Parliamentary consultants the Union seeks to influence education legislation.

#### **Constituent Associations**

Membership of the Union is through constituent associations. These are the central associations, single-association divisions where the association covers the whole geographical area of the local authority (LA) and local associations where there is more than one association within the area of the LA. Subscription is collected nationally. The officers and committees of associations are elected by the membership. Policies are determined at general meetings which are subject to rules and standing orders approved by the National Executive. Associations submit motions and send representatives to Annual Conference.

#### **Central Associations**

The Central Associations of the Union are the Central Overseas Service Schools Association, the National Association of Youth and Community Education Officers and the Further Education and Youth Service Association of Wales.

### **Divisions**

Responsibility for negotiation with local authorities rests with the NUT's divisions, there being a division for each local authority. Local associations affiliate to the division relevant to their LA area.

### **Conference**

The policies of the NUT are determined at Annual Conference through debates on motions submitted for consideration by associations, divisions and the Executive. Conference is the supreme policy making body of the NUT.

### **Executive**

The affairs of the NUT are managed by the Executive. The Executive consists of the officers of the Union, elected nationally, 37 members, elected from 27 electoral districts, and one Black Member Constituency Seat.

### **Headquarters**

NUT headquarters is at Hamilton House in London. Headquarters departments are responsible for policy development and implementation; national negotiations; national issues; membership recording and central collection of subscriptions; and providing support to the regional structure. The first points of contact for Union members should always be the local association secretary and the appropriate regional office or the NUT Wales Office, NUT Cymru.

### **Direct Support**

Protection for teachers is a major priority for the NUT. It has always offered to members a far higher level of service in the area in which they teach than any other teachers' organisation.

In order to provide direct support and guidance to members the Union has a network of regional offices and the NUT office in Wales, NUT Cymru.

England is divided into nine regions, with a full time staff of between eight and eleven people serving each region. Each office is headed by a regional secretary and contains a

team of regional officers, principal officers, professional and clerical staff, whose major responsibility is to support, assist and defend members.

Wales has its own office, NUT Cymru, fully bilingual, staffed on similar lines, with the addition of a specialist education officer.

The Union has a team of solicitors, based at regional offices and in the NUT Wales Office, NUT Cymru, whose role is to provide legal assistance to members.

All this is in addition to the many hundreds of voluntary division and association officers and school representatives who advise and assist members.

## Appendix 2

### Timeline showing key moments in policy changes to and initiatives in education

Date	Policy/Initiative	Function
1967	Plowden Report: 'Children and their Primary Schools'	To review and improve primary education
1984	Council for the Accreditation for Teacher Education (CATE) established	To approve Teacher Education courses
1989	The National Curriculum	To standardise teaching and testing in England
1992	Education (Schools) Act	To increase the number of school inspections
1998	Green Paper: 'Teaching: meeting the challenge of change'	To improve teaching, including Initial Teacher Education.
1998	Teaching and Higher Education Act	To improve standards of teaching and set up a General Teaching Council
2000	General Teaching Council established	To be a regulatory body for the teaching profession, as a direct result of the 1998 'Teaching and Higher Education' Act
2002	Teach First	A business set up to recruit graduates to work in schools as teachers after 6 weeks training

2003	'Raising standards and tackling workload: a national agreement'	To reduce teachers' workload, in conjunction with the agreement of teacher unions
2005	'Remodelling the school workforce'	To allow unqualified people to teach children
2005	Publication of PISA results by OECD	To show that Finland achieves top ranking in education in Europe
2005	Education Act	To supersede the 1999 Education (Schools) Act and allow for more regular inspections
2006	The Children's Plan	Among other issues, to make teaching a Master level profession
2006	Standards for Teaching Assistants	To provide a career structure for teaching assistants
2007	Standards for Teachers	To update the existing standards for teachers
2007	Higher Level Teaching Assistant candidate handbook	To detail the career structure for HLTAs
2009	The Cambridge Primary Review	To review and improve primary education, superseding the Plowden Report
2009	General Teaching Council Code of Practice	To provide rules and regulations by which teachers must abide

2010	'The Importance of teaching: the school white paper 2010'	To reform education
2010	Academies Act	To enable secondary schools freedom to allocate funding
2010	'Troops to Teachers' launched	To recruit former military personnel to train as teachers
2011	'Supporting Families the Foundation Years'	To establish Early Years Practitioner (EYP) qualification
2011	ITT Implementation Plan	To take ITE away from universities into schools
2011	Independent Review of Teachers' Standards	To review Teachers' Standards, chaired by Sally Coates
2012	'Great teachers: attracting training and recruiting best'	To gather evidence on progress of teacher training
2012	Teaching Agency established	To replace TDA, which replaced TTA, which replaced CATE
2012	HLTA Programme: Professional Standards	To establish a professional route for Higher Level Teaching Assistants
2012	Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) established	To replace EYP
2012	Standards for Teachers	To replace the existing Teachers' Standards

2012	Letter from Sir Michael Wilshaw	To explain the new arrangements and grade for Ofsted inspections
2012	School Direct program launched	To recruit graduates to train in schools
2013	Early Years Teacher (EYT) qualification introduced	To allow people to qualify to teach children from birth to 5 years only
2015	Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training	To review current provision of ITT in universities and schools
2015	'Exam Factories?' report published	Independent report by Hutchings re testing and children's mental health



### **Appendix 3**

#### **Ethics forms**

#### **Information for Participants**

Dear .....

I am currently studying for a PhD at Leeds Metropolitan University and would be grateful if you would consider helping me by becoming a research participant. The title of my research is 'Teacher professional, trade unionism and gender; a response from women NUT activists'.

As a current teacher and a woman who is active in the NUT, it would be very helpful to my work if you would be willing to be interviewed. If you do not wish to do so, that is fine, but please let me know. However, if you would be willing to participate, then I can assure you that the data you give me will be confidential and anonymous, and that it will, once my project has been assessed, be destroyed.

Should you be interested in taking part in this research, I will arrange the interview at a mutually convenient time and place for us both.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

**Jean Laight**

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**Consent form for participants**

I have read the letter given to me by Jean Laight who is collecting data for her PhD research as a student at Leeds Metropolitan University, the title of which is 'Teacher professionalism, trade unionism and gender: a response from women NUT activists'.

I agree to be interviewed and I understand that the resulting data will be confidential and anonymous. I also understand that, once the project has been assessed, the data will be destroyed.

I understand that I can withdraw from the research as a participant at any time.

Signed.....

Name(printed).....

Date.....

## Appendix 4

### Categories in order of frequency

Ranking	Category	Number of occurrences
1st	Tensions	154
2nd	Activism	133
3rd	Identity and sense of self	110
4th	Professional integrity/commitment	59
5th	Support	51
6 <sup>th</sup>	Family/personal	41
7th	Career/training described (to contextualise)	29
8th	Empowerment	25
9th	Cooperation/collective	23
10th	Resilience	21
11th	Government control	18
12th	Voice	17
13th	Government changes	11
14th	Surveillance/accountability	9
15th	Trade union background	8
=	Work/life balance	8
=	NUT global work	8
18th	Critical incident	6
19th	NUT CPD	1

## Appendix 5

### Top 3 ranking categories of frequency for each participant

Participant	Most frequent	2 <sup>nd</sup> most frequent	3 <sup>rd</sup> most frequent
Brenda	Tensions	Activism	Identity
Lisa	Family	Tensions=	Support=
Rose	Activism	Tensions	Identity
Yasmin	Identity	Tensions	Activism
Anna	Activism	Tensions	Identity
Penny	Tensions	Activism	Identity
Julie	Tensions	Professional integrity	Activism
Maureen	Tensions	Identity=	Activism=
Jenny	Tensions	Identity	Activism
Debbie	Support	Tensions	Activism
Carol	Support	Tensions	Activism

**Tensions** – mentioned by 11 out of 11 participants

**Activism** – mentioned by 10 out of 11 participants

**Identity** – mentioned by 7 out of 11 participants

**Other** – support 3/11; family 1/11; professional integrity 1/11.

## **Appendix 6**

### **Role of the National President of the NUT**

The National President is the most senior elected lay officer in the Union and is called upon to represent the Union in the UK and abroad. She/he also has responsibility for chairing meetings of the Executive and Conference.

The National President is democratically elected by the members, the term of office being one year. Initially, a member will be elected to the role of Junior Vice President, leading automatically to the role of Senior Vice President and subsequently taking over the role of National President.

The first and most visible role of the National President occurs at the National Conference, held at Easter, where the National President is newly invested and is required to make an initial speech to the assembled conference and preside over the proceedings for the duration of the conference. Conference spans 5 consecutive days, from the Friday to the Tuesday encompassing Easter.

The main role of the National President is that of ambassador for the Union, addressing audiences from national and international conferences to local association meetings. The National President takes a year's sabbatical in order to perform the required roles and duties, supported by the NUT.